

STORIES BY MRS. MOLESWORTH



WITH PICTURES BY
EDNA COOKE



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Stories by MRS. MOLESWORTH

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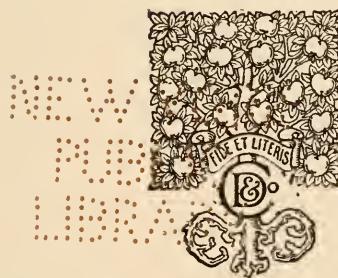
"It's a royal salute," said the Cuckoo.

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STORIES BY MRS. MOLESWORTH

COMPILED BY
SIDNEY BALDWIN

With Pictures by
EDNA COOKE



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THE CUCKOO CLOCK

CHAPTER I

THE OLD HOUSE

“Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country seat.”

ONCE upon a time in an old town, in an old street, there stood a very old house. Such a house as you could hardly find nowadays, however you searched, for it belonged to a gone-by time—a time now quite passed away.

It stood in a street, but yet it was not like a town house, for though the front opened right on to the pavement, the back windows looked out upon a beautiful, quaintly terraced garden, with old trees growing so thick and close together that in summer it was like living on the edge of a forest to be near them; and even in winter the web of their interlaced branches hid all clear view behind.

There was a colony of rooks in this old garden. Year after year they held their parliaments and cawed and chattered and fussed; year after year they built their nests and hatched their eggs; year after year, *I suppose*, the old ones gradually died off and the young ones took their place, though, but for knowing this *must* be so, no one would have suspected it, for to all appearance the rooks were always the same—ever and always the same.

Time indeed seemed to stand still in and all about the old house, as if it and the people who inhabited it had got *so* old that they could not get any older, and had outlived the possibility of change.

But one day at last there did come a change. Late in the dusk of an autumn afternoon a carriage drove up to the door of

the old house, came rattling over the stones with a sudden noisy clatter that sounded quite impertinent, startling the rooks just as they were composing themselves to rest, and setting them all wondering what could be the matter.

A little girl was the matter! A little girl in a gray merino frock and gray beaver bonnet, gray tippet and gray gloves—all gray together, even to her eyes, all except her round rosy face and bright brown hair. Her name even was rather gray, for it was Griselda.

A gentleman lifted her out of the carriage and disappeared with her into the house, and later that same evening the gentleman came out of the house and got into the carriage which had come back for him again, and drove away. That was all that the rooks saw of the change that had come to the old house. Shall we go inside to see more?

Up the shallow, wide, old-fashioned staircase, past the wainscoted walls, dark and shining like a mirror, down a long narrow passage with many doors, which but for their gleaming brass handles one would not have known were there, the oldest of the three old servants led little Griselda, so tired and sleepy that her supper had been left almost untasted, to the room prepared for her. It was a queer room, for everything in the house was queer; but in the dancing light of the fire burning brightly in the tiled grate, it looked cheerful enough.

“I am glad there’s a fire,” said the child. “Will it keep alight till the morning, do you think?”

The old servant shook her head.

“Twould not be safe to leave it so that it would burn till morning,” she said. “When you are in bed and asleep, little missie, you won’t want the fire. Bed’s the warmest place.”

“It isn’t for that I want it,” said Griselda; “it’s for the light I like it. This house all looks so dark to me, and yet there seem to be lights hidden in the walls too, they shine so.”

The old servant smiled.

"It will all seem strange to you, no doubt," she said; "but you'll get to like it, missie. 'Tis a *good* old house, and those that know best love it well."

"Whom do you mean?" said Griselda. "Do you mean my great-aunts?"

"Ah, yes, and others beside," replied the old woman. "The rooks love it well, and others beside. Did you ever hear tell of the 'good people,' missie, over the sea where you come from?"

"Fairies, do you mean?" cried Griselda, her eyes sparkling. "Of course I've *heard* of them, but I never saw any? Did you ever?"

"I couldn't say," answered the old woman. "My mind is not young like yours, missie, and there are times when strange memories come back to me as of sights and sounds in a dream. I am too old to see and hear as I once could. We are all old here, missie. 'Twas time something young came to the old house again."

"How strange and queer everything seems!" thought Griselda, as she got into bed. "I don't feel as if I belonged to it a bit. And they are so old: perhaps they won't like having a child among them?"

The very same thought that had occurred to the rooks! They could not decide as to the fors and againsts at all, so they settled to put it to the vote the next morning, and in the meantime they and Griselda all went to sleep.

I never heard if *they* slept well that night; after such unusual excitement it was hardly to be expected they would. But Griselda, being a little girl and not a rook, was so tired that two minutes after she had tucked herself up in bed she was quite sound asleep, and did not wake for several hours.

"I wonder what it will all look like in the morning," was her last waking thought. "If it was summer now, or spring, I shouldn't mind—there would always be something nice to do then."

As sometimes happens, when she woke again, very early in the morning, long before it was light, her thoughts went straight on with the same subject.

“If it was summer now, or spring,” she repeated to herself, just as if she had not been asleep at all—like the man who fell into a trance for a hundred years just as he was saying “it is bitt—” and when he woke up again finished the sentence as if nothing had happened—“erly cold.” “If only it was spring,” thought Griselda.

Just as she had got so far in her thoughts, she gave a great start. What was it she heard? Could her wish have come true? Was this fairyland indeed that she had got to, where one only needs to *wish*, for it to *be*? She rubbed her eyes, but it was too dark to see; *that* was not very fairyland-like, but her ears she felt certain had not deceived her: she was quite, quite sure that she had heard the cuckoo!

She listened with all her might, but she did not hear it again. Could it, after all, have been fancy? She grew sleepy at last, and was just dropping off when—yes, there it was again, as clear and distinct as possible—“Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!” three, four, five times, then perfect silence as before.

“What a funny cuckoo,” said Griselda to herself. “I could almost fancy it was in the house. I wonder if my great-aunts have a tame cuckoo in a cage? I don’t *think* I ever heard of such a thing, but this is such a queer house; everything seems different in it—perhaps they have a tame cuckoo. I’ll ask them in the morning. It’s very nice to hear, whatever it is.”

And, with a pleasant feeling of companionship, a sense that she was not the only living creature awake in this dark world, Griselda lay listening, contentedly enough, for the sweet, fresh notes of the cuckoo’s friendly greeting. But before it sounded again through the silent house she was once more fast asleep. And this time she slept till daylight had found its way into all but the *very* darkest nooks and crannies of the ancient dwelling.

She dressed herself carefully, for she had been warned that her aunts loved neatness and precision; she fastened each button of her gray frock, and tied down her hair as smooth as such a brown tangle *could* be tied down; and, absorbed with these weighty cares, she forgot all about the cuckoo for the time. It was not till she was sitting at breakfast with her aunts that she remembered it, or rather was reminded of it, by some little remark that was made about the friendly robins on the terrace walk outside.

“Oh, aunt,” she exclaimed, stopping short halfway the journey to her mouth of a spoonful of bread and milk, “have you got a cuckoo in a cage?”

“A cuckoo in a cage,” repeated her elder aunt, Miss Grizzel; “what is the child talking about?”

“In a cage!” echoed Miss Tabitha, “a cuckoo in a cage!”

“There is a cuckoo somewhere in the house,” said Griselda; “I heard it in the night. It couldn’t have been out-of-doors, could it? It would be too cold.”

The aunts looked at each other with a little smile. “So like her grandmother,” they whispered. Then said Miss Grizzel—

“We have a cuckoo, my dear, though it isn’t in a cage, and it isn’t exactly the sort of cuckoo you are thinking of. It lives in a clock.”

“In a clock,” repeated Miss Tabitha, as if to confirm her sister’s statement.

“In a clock!” exclaimed Griselda, opening her gray eyes very wide.

It sounded something like the three bears, all speaking one after the other, only Griselda’s voice was not like Tiny’s; it was the loudest of the three.

“In a clock!” she exclaimed; “but it can’t be alive, then?”

“Why not?” said Miss Grizzel.

“I don’t know,” replied Griselda, looking puzzled.

“I knew a little girl once,” pursued Miss Grizzel, “who was quite of opinion the cuckoo *was* alive, and nothing would have

persuaded her it was not. Finish your breakfast, my dear, and then if you like you shall come with me and see the cuckoo for yourself."

"Thank you, Aunt Grizzel," said Griselda, going on with her bread and milk.

"Yes," said Miss Tabitha, "you shall see the cuckoo for yourself."

"Thank you, Aunt Tabitha," said Griselda. It was rather a bother to have always to say "thank you," or "no, thank you," twice, but Griselda thought it was polite to do so, as Aunt Tabitha always repeated everything that Aunt Grizzel said. It wouldn't have mattered so much if Aunt Tabitha had said it *at once* after Miss Grizzel, but as she generally made a little pause between, it was sometimes rather awkward. But of course it was better to say "thank you" or "no, thank you" twice over than to hurt Aunt Tabitha's feelings.

After breakfast Aunt Grizzel was as good as her word. She took Griselda through several of the rooms in the house, pointing out all the curiosities, and telling all the histories of the rooms and their contents; and Griselda liked to listen, only in every room they came to, she wondered *when* they would get to the room where lived the cuckoo.

Aunt Tabitha did not come with them, for she was rather rheumatic. On the whole, Griselda was not sorry. It would have taken such a *very* long time, you see, to have had all the histories twice over, and possibly, if Griselda had got tired, she might have forgotten about the "thank you's" or "no, thank you's" twice over.

The old house looked quite as queer and quaint by daylight as it had seemed the evening before; almost more so indeed, for the view from the windows added to the sweet, odd "old-fashionedness" of everything.

"We have beautiful roses in summer," observed Miss Grizzel, catching sight of the direction in which the child's eyes were wandering.

"I wish it was summer. I do love summer," said Griselda. "But there is a very rosy scent in the rooms even now, Aunt Grizzel, though it is winter, or nearly winter."

Miss Grizzel looked pleased.

"My pot-pourri," she explained.

They were just then standing in what she called the "great saloon," a handsome old room, furnished with gold-and-white chairs, that must once have been brilliant, and faded yellow damask hangings. A feeling of awe had crept over Griselda as they entered this ancient drawing-room. What grand parties there must have been in it long ago! But as for dancing in it *now*—dancing, or laughing, or chattering—such a thing was quite impossible to imagine!

Miss Grizzel crossed the room to where stood in one corner a marvellous Chinese cabinet, all black and gold and carving. It was made in the shape of a temple, or a palace—Griselda was not sure which. Any way, it was very delicious and wonderful. At the door stood, one on each side, two solemn mandarins; or, to speak more correctly, perhaps I should say, a mandarin and his wife, for the right-hand figure was evidently intended to be a lady.

Miss Grizzel gently touched their heads. Forthwith, to Griselda's astonishment, they began solemnly to nod.

"Oh, how do you make them do that, Aunt Grizzel?" she exclaimed.

"Never you mind, my dear; it wouldn't do for *you* to try to make them nod. They wouldn't like it," replied Miss Grizzel mysteriously. "Respect to your elders, my dear, always remember that. The mandarins are *many* years older than you—older than I myself, in fact."

Griselda wondered, if this were so, how it was that Miss Grizzel took such liberties with them herself, but she said nothing.

"Here is my last summer's pot-pourri," continued Miss Grizzel, touching a great china jar on a little stand, close beside the cabinet. "You may smell it, my dear."

Nothing loth, Griselda buried her round little nose in the fragrant leaves.

"It's lovely," she said. "May I smell it whenever I like, Aunt Grizzel?"

"We shall see," replied her aunt. "It isn't *every* little girl, you know, that we could trust to come into the great saloon alone."

"No," said Griselda meekly.

Miss Grizzel led the way to a door opposite to that by which they had entered. She opened it and passed through, Griselda following, into a small ante-room.

"It is on the stroke of ten," said Miss Grizzel, consulting her watch; "now, my dear, you shall make acquaintance with our cuckoo."

The cuckoo "that lived in a clock!" Griselda gazed round her eagerly. Where was the clock? She could see nothing in the least like one, only up on the wall in one corner was what looked like a miniature house, of dark brown carved wood. It was not so *very* like a house, but it certainly had a roof—a roof with deep projecting eaves; and, looking closer, yes, it *was* a clock, after all, only the figures, which had once been gilt, had grown dim with age, like everything else, and the hands at a little distance were hardly to be distinguished from the face.

Miss Grizzel stood perfectly still, looking up at the clock; Griselda beside her, in breathless expectation. Presently there came a sort of distant rumbling. *Something* was going to happen. Suddenly two little doors above the clock face, which Griselda had not known were there, sprang open with a burst and out flew a cuckoo, flapped his wings, and uttered his pretty cry, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" Miss Grizzel counted aloud, "Seven, eight, nine, ten. Yes, he never makes a mistake," she added triumphantly. "All these long years I have never known him wrong. There are no such clocks made nowadays, I can assure you, my dear."

"But *is* it a clock? Isn't he alive?" exclaimed Griselda.

"He looked at me and nodded his head, before he flapped his wings and went into his house again—he did indeed, aunt," she said earnestly; "just like saying, 'How do you do?' to me."

Again Miss Grizzel smiled, the same odd yet pleased smile that Griselda had seen on her face at breakfast. "Just what Sybilla used to say," she murmured. "Well, my dear," she added aloud, "it is quite right he *should* say, 'How do you do?' to you. It is the first time he has seen you, though many a year ago he knew your dear grandmother, and your father, too, when he was a little boy. You will find him a good friend, and one that can teach you many lessons."

"What, Aunt Grizzel?" inquired Griselda, looking puzzled.

"Punctuality, for one thing, and faithful discharge of duty," replied Miss Grizzel.

"May I come to see the cuckoo—to watch for him coming out, sometimes?" asked Griselda, who felt as if she could spend all day looking up at the clock, watching for her little friend's appearance.

"You will see him several times a day," said her aunt, "for it is in this little room I intend you to prepare your tasks. It is nice and quiet, and nothing to disturb you, and close to the room where your Aunt Tabitha and I usually sit."

So saying, Miss Grizzel opened a second door in the little ante-room, and, to Griselda's surprise, at the foot of a short flight of stairs through another door, half open, she caught sight of her Aunt Tabitha, knitting quietly by the fire, in the room in which they had breakfasted.

"What a *very* funny house it is, Aunt Grizzel," she said, as she followed her aunt down the steps. "Every room has so many doors, and you come back to where you were just when you think you are ever so far off. I shall never be able to find my way about."

"Oh, yes, you will, my dear, *very* soon," said her aunt encouragingly.

"She is very kind," thought Griselda; "but I wish she wouldn't call my lessons tasks. It makes them sound so dreadfully hard. But, anyway, I'm glad I'm to do them in the room where that dear cuckoo lives."

CHAPTER II

IMPATIENT GRISELDA

"... fairies but seldom appear;
If we do wrong we must expect
That it will cost us dear!"

IT was all very well for a few days. Griselda found plenty to amuse herself with while the novelty lasted, enough to prevent her missing *very* badly the home she had left "over the sea," and the troop of noisy merry brothers who teased and petted her. Of course she *missed* them, but not "dreadfully." She was neither homesick nor "dull."

It was not quite such smooth sailing when lessons began. She did not dislike lessons; in fact, she had always thought she was rather fond of them. But the having to do them alone was not lively, and her teachers were very strict. The worst of all was the writing and arithmetic master, a funny old man who wore knee-breeches and took snuff, and called her aunt "Madame," bowing formally whenever he addressed her. He screwed Griselda up into such an unnatural attitude to write her copies, that she really felt as if she would never come straight and loose again; and the arithmetic part of his instructions was even worse. Oh! what sums in addition he gave her! Griselda had never been partial to sums, and her rather easy-going governess at home had not, to tell the truth, been partial to them either. And Mr.—I can't remember the little old gentleman's name. Suppose we call him Mr. Kneebreeches—Mr. Kneebreeches, when he found this out, conscientiously put her back to the very beginning.

It was dreadful, really. He came twice a week, and the days he didn't come were as bad as those he did, for he left her a whole *row* I was going to say, but you couldn't call Mr. Kneebreeches' addition sums "rows," they were far too fat and wide across to be so spoken of!—whole slatefuls of these terrible mountains of figures to climb wearily to the top of. And not to climb *once* up merely. *The* terrible thing was Mr. Kneebreeches' favourite method of what he called "proving." I can't explain it—it is far beyond my poor powers—but it had something to do with cutting off the top line, after you had added it all up and had actually done the sum, you understand—cutting off the top line and adding the long rows up again without it, and then joining it on again somewhere else.

"I wouldn't mind so much," said poor Griselda, one day, "if it was any good. But you see, Aunt Grizzel, it isn't. For I'm just as likely to do the *proving* wrong as the sum itself—more likely, for I'm always so tired when I get to the proving—and so all that's proved is that *something's* wrong, and I'm sure that isn't any good, except to make me cross."

"Hush!" said her aunt gravely. "That is not the way for a little girl to speak. Improve these golden hours of youth, Griselda; they will never return."

"I hope not," muttered Griselda, "if it means doing sums."

Miss Grizzel fortunately was a little deaf; she did not hear this remark. Just then the cuckoo clock struck eleven.

"Good little cuckoo," said Miss Grizzel. "What an example he sets you. His life is spent in the faithful discharge of duty;" and so saying she left the room.

The cuckoo was still telling the hour—eleven took a good while. It seemed to Griselda that the bird repeated her aunt's last words. "Faith—ful, dis—charge, of—your, du—ty," he said, "faith—ful."

"You horrid little creature!" exclaimed Griselda in a passion; "what business have you to mock me?"

She seized a book, the first that came to hand, and flung it at the bird who was just beginning his eleventh cuckoo. He disappeared with a snap, disappeared without flapping his wings, or, as Griselda always fancied he did, giving her a friendly nod, and in an instant all was silent.

Griselda felt a little frightened. What had she done? She looked up at the clock. It seemed just the same as usual, the cuckoo's doors closely shut, no sign of any disturbance. Could it have been her fancy only that he had sprung back more hastily than he would have done but for her throwing the book at him? She began to hope so, and tried to go on with her lessons. But it was no use. Though she really gave her best attention to the long addition sums, and found that by so doing she managed them much better than before, she could not feel happy or at ease. Every few minutes she glanced up at the clock, as if expecting the cuckoo to come out, though she knew quite well there was no chance of his doing so till twelve o'clock, as it was only the hours, not the half hours and quarters, that he told.

"I wish it was twelve o'clock," she said to herself anxiously more than once.

If only the clock had not been so very high up on the wall, she would have been tempted to climb up and open the little doors, and peep in to satisfy herself as to the cuckoo's condition. But there was no possibility of this. The clock was far, very far above her reach, and there was no high piece of furniture standing near, upon which she could have climbed to get it. There was nothing to be done but to wait for twelve o'clock.

And, after all, she did not wait for twelve o'clock, for just about half-past eleven, Miss Grizzel's voice was heard calling to her to put on her hat and cloak quickly, and come out to walk up and down the terrace with her.

"It is fine just now," said Miss Grizzel, "but there is a prospect of rain before long. You must leave your lessons for the present, and finish them in the afternoon."

"I have finished them," said Griselda, meekly.

"*All?*" inquired her aunt.

"Yes, all," replied Griselda.

"Ah, well, then, this afternoon, if the rain holds off, we shall drive to Merrybrow Hall, and inquire for the health of your dear godmother, Lady Lavander," said Miss Grizzel.

Poor Griselda! There were few things she disliked more than a drive with her aunts. They went in the old yellow chariot, with all the windows up, and of course Griselda had to sit with her back to the horses, which made her very uncomfortable when she had no air, and had to sit still for so long.

Merrybrow Hall was a large house, quite as old and much grander, but not nearly so wonderful as the home of Griselda's aunts. It was six miles off, and it took a very long time indeed to drive there in the rumbling old chariot, for the old horses were fat and wheezy, and the old coachman fat and wheezy too. Lady Lavander was, of course, old too—very old indeed, and rather grumpy and very deaf. Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha had the greatest respect for her; she always called them "My dear," as if they were quite girls, and they listened to all she said as if her words were of gold. For some mysterious reason she had been invited to be Griselda's godmother; but, as she had never shown her any proof of affection beyond giving her a prayer-book, and hoping, whenever she saw her, that she was "a good little miss," Griselda did not feel any particular cause for gratitude to her.

The drive seemed longer and duller than ever this afternoon, but Griselda bore it meekly; and when Lady Lavander, as usual, expressed her hopes about her, the little girl looked down modestly, feeling her cheeks grow scarlet. "I am not a good little girl at all," she felt inclined to call out. "I'm very bad and cruel. I believe I've killed the dear little cuckoo."

What *would* the three old ladies have thought if she had called it out? As it was, Lady Lavander patted her approvingly, said she loved to see young people modest and humble-minded,

and gave her a slice of very highly-spiced, rather musty ginger-bread, which Griselda couldn't bear.

All the way home Griselda felt in a fever of impatience to rush up to the ante-room and see if the cuckoo was all right again. It was late and dark when the chariot at last stopped at the door of the old house. Miss Grizzel got out slowly, and still more slowly Miss Tabitha followed her. Griselda was obliged to restrain herself and move demurely.

"It is past your supper-time, my dear," said Miss Grizzel. "Go up at once to your room, and Doreas shall bring some supper to you. Late hours are bad for young people."

Griselda obediently wished her aunts good-night, and went quietly upstairs. But once out of sight, at the first landing, she changed her pace. She turned to the left instead of to the right, which led to her own room, and flew rather than ran along the dimly-lighted passage, at the end of which a door led into the great saloon. She opened the door. All was quite dark. It was impossible to fly or run across the great saloon! Even in daylight this would have been a difficult matter. Griselda *felt* her way as best she could, past the Chinese cabinet and the pot-pourri jar, till she got to the ante-room door. It was open, and now, knowing her way better, she hurried in. But what was the use? All was silent, save the tick-tick of the cuckoo clock in the corner. Oh, if *only* the cuckoo would come out and call the hour as usual, what a weight would be lifted off Griselda's heart!

She had no idea what o'clock it was. It might be close to the hour, or it might be just past it. She stood listening for a few minutes, then hearing Miss Grizzel's voice in the distance, she felt that she dared not stay any longer, and turned to feel her way out of the room again. Just as she got to the door it seemed to her that something softly brushed her cheek, and a very, very faint "cuckoo" sounded as it were in the air close to her.

Startled, but not frightened, Griselda stood perfectly still.

"Cuckoo," she said, softly. But there was no answer.

Again the tones of Miss Grizzel's voice coming upstairs reached her ear.

"I *must* go," said Griselda; and finding her way across the saloon without, by great good luck, tumbling against any of the many breakable treasures with which it was filled, she flew down the long passage again, reaching her own room just before Dorcas appeared with her supper.

Griselda slept badly that night. She was constantly dreaming of the cuckoo, fancying she heard his voice, and then waking with a start to find it was *only* fancy. She looked pale and heavy-eyed when she came down to breakfast the next morning; and her Aunt Tabitha, who was alone in the room when she entered, began immediately asking her what was the matter.

"I am sure you are going to be ill, child," she said nervously. "Sister Grizzel must give you some medicine. I wonder what would be the best. Tansy tea is an excellent thing when one has taken cold, or——"

But the rest of Miss Tabitha's sentence was never heard, for at this moment Miss Grizzel came hurriedly into the room—her cap awry, her shawl disarranged, her face very pale. I hardly think any one had ever seen her so discomposed before.

"Sister Tabitha!" she exclaimed, "what can be going to happen? The cuckoo clock has stopped."

"The cuckoo clock has stopped!" repeated Miss Tabitha, holding up her hands; "*impossible!*"

"But it has, or rather I should say—dear me, I am so upset I cannot explain myself—the *cuckoo* has stopped. The clock is going on, but the cuckoo has not told the hours, and Dorcas is of opinion that he left off doing so yesterday. What can be going to happen? What shall we do?"

"What can we do?" said Miss Tabitha. "Should we send for the watch-maker?"

Miss Grizzel shook her head.

"Twould be worse than useless. Were we to search the world

over, we could find no one to put it right. Fifty years and more, Tabitha, fifty years and more, it has never missed an hour! We are getting old, Tabitha, our day is nearly over; perhaps 'tis to remind us of this."

Miss Tabitha did not reply. She was weeping silently. The old ladies seemed to have forgotten the presence of their niece, but Griselda could not bear to see their distress. She finished her breakfast as quickly as she could, and left the room.

On her way upstairs she met Dorcas.

"Have you heard what has happened, little missie?" said the old servant.

"Yes," replied Griselda.

"My ladies are in great trouble," continued Dorcas, who seemed inclined to be more communicative than usual, "and no wonder. For fifty years that clock has never gone wrong."

"Can't it be put right?" asked the child.

Dorcas shook her head.

"No good would come of interfering," she said. "What must be, must be. The luck of the house hangs on that clock. Its maker spent a good part of his life over it, and his last words were that it would bring good luck to the house that owned it, but that trouble would follow its silence. It's my belief," she added solemnly, "that it's a *fairy* clock, neither more nor less, for good luck it has brought there's no denying. There are no cows like ours, missie—their milk is a proverb hereabouts; there are no hens like ours for laying all the year round; there are no roses like ours. And there's always a friendly feeling in this house, and always has been. 'Tis not a house for wrangling and jangling, and sharp words. The 'good people' can't stand that. Nothing drives them away like ill-temper or anger."

Griselda's conscience gave her a sharp prick. Could it be *her* doing that trouble was coming upon the old house? What a punishment for a moment's fit of ill-temper.

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Dorcas," she said; "it makes me so unhappy."

"What a feeling heart the child has!" said the old servant as she went on her way downstairs. "It's true—she is very like Miss Sybilla."

That day was a very weary and sad one for Griselda. She was oppressed by a feeling she did not understand. She knew she had done wrong, but she had sorely repented it, and "I do think the cuckoo might have come back again," she said to herself, "if he is a fairy; and if he isn't, it can't be true what Dorcas says."

Her aunts made no allusion to the subject in her presence, and almost seemed to have forgotten that she had known of their distress. They were more grave and silent than usual, but otherwise things went on in their ordinary way. Griselda spent the morning "at her tasks," in the ante-room, but was thankful to get away from the tick-tick of the clock in the corner and out into the garden.

But there, alas! it was just as bad. The rooks seemed to know that something was the matter; they set to work making such a chatter immediately Griselda appeared that she felt inclined to run back into the house again.

"I am sure they are talking about me," she said to herself. "Perhaps they are fairies too. I am beginning to think I don't like fairies."

She was glad when bed-time came. It was a sort of reproach to her to see her aunts so pale and troubled; and though she tried to persuade herself that she thought them very silly, she could not throw off the uncomfortable feeling.

She was so tired when she went to bed—tired in the disagreeable way that comes from a listless, uneasy day—that she fell asleep at once and slept heavily. When she woke, which she did suddenly, and with a start, it was still perfectly dark, like the first morning that she had wakened in the old house. It seemed to her that she had not wakened of herself—something had

roused her. Yes! there it was again, a very, *very* soft distant "cuckoo." *Was* it distant? She could not tell. Almost she could have fancied it was close to her.

"If it's that cuckoo come back again, I'll catch him!" exclaimed Griselda.

She darted out of bed, felt her way to the door, which was closed, and opening it let in a rush of moonlight from the unshuttered passage window. In another moment her little bare feet were pattering along the passage at full speed, in the direction of the great saloon.

For Griselda's childhood among the troop of noisy brothers had taught her one lesson—she was afraid of nothing. Or rather perhaps I should say she had never learnt that there was anything to be afraid of! And is there?

CHAPTER III

OBEYING ORDERS

"Little girl, thou must thy part fulfil,
If we're to take kindly to ours:
Then pull up the weeds with a will,
And fairies will cherish the flowers."

THERE was moonlight, though not so much, in the saloon and the ante-room, too; for though the windows, like those in Griselda's bedroom, had the shutters closed, there was a round part at the top, high up, which the shutters did not reach to, and in crept, through these clear uncovered panes, quite as many moon-beams, you may be sure, as could find their way.

Griselda, eager though she was, could not help standing still a moment to admire the effect.

"It looks prettier with the light coming in at those holes at the top than even if the shutters were open," she said to herself. "How goldy-silvery the cabinet looks; and, yes, I do declare, the

mandarins are nodding! I wonder if it is out of politeness to me, or does Aunt Grizzel come in last thing at night and touch them to make them keep nodding till morning? I suppose they're a sort of policemen to the palace; and I dare say there are all sorts of beautiful things inside. How I should like to see all through it!"

But at this moment the faint tick-tick of the cuckoo clock in the next room, reaching her ear, reminded her of the object of this midnight expedition of hers. She hurried into the ante-room.

It looked darker than the great saloon, for it had but one window. But through the uncovered space at the top of this window there penetrated some brilliant moonbeams, one of which lighted up brightly the face of the clock with its queer overhanging eaves.

Griselda approached it and stood below, looking up.

"Cuckoo," she said softly—very softly.

But there was no reply.

"Cuckoo," she repeated rather more loudly. "Why won't you speak to me? I know you are there, and you're not asleep, for I heard your voice in my own room. Why won't you come out, cuckoo?"

"Tick-tick" said the clock, but there was no other reply.

Griselda felt ready to cry.

"Cuckoo," she said reproachfully, "I didn't think you were so hard-hearted. I have been so unhappy about you, and I was so pleased to hear your voice again, for I thought I had killed you, or hurt you very badly; and I didn't *mean* to hurt you, cuckoo. I was sorry the moment I had done it, *dreadfully* sorry. Dear cuckoo, won't you forgive me?"

There was a little sound at last—a faint *coming* sound, and by the moonlight Griselda saw the doors open, and out flew the cuckoo. He stood still for a moment, looked round him as it were, then gently flapped his wings, and uttered his usual note—"Cuckoo."

Griselda stood in breathless expectation, but in her delight she could not help very softly clapping her hands.

The cuckoo cleared his throat. You never heard such a funny little noise as he made; and then, in a very clear, distinct, but yet "cuckoo-y" voice, he spoke.

"Griselda," he said, "are you truly sorry?"

"I told you I was," she replied. "But I didn't *feel* so very naughty, cuckoo. I didn't, really. I was only vexed for one moment, and when I threw the book I seemed to be a very little in fun, too. And it made me so unhappy when you went away, and my poor aunts have been dreadfully unhappy too. If you hadn't come back I should have told them to-morrow what I had done. I would have told them before, but I was afraid it would have made them more unhappy. I thought I had hurt you dreadfully."

"So you did," said the cuckoo.

"But you *look* quite well," said Griselda.

"It was my *feelings*," replied the cuckoo; "and I couldn't help going away. I have to obey orders like other people."

Griselda stared. "How do you mean?" she asked.

"Never mind. You can't understand at present," said the cuckoo. "You can understand about obeying *your* orders, and you see, when you don't things go wrong."

"Yes," said Griselda humbly, "they certainly do. But, cuckoo," she continued, "I never used to get into tempers at home —hardly never, at least; and I liked my lessons then, and I never was scolded about them."

"What's wrong here, then?" said the cuckoo. "It isn't often that things go wrong in this house."

"That's what Dorcas says," said Griselda. "It must be with my being a child—my aunts and the house and everything have got out of children's ways."

"About time they did," remarked the cuckoo drily.

"And so," continued Griselda, "it is really very dull. I have

lots of lessons, but it isn't so much that I mind. It is that I've no one to play with."

"There's something in that," said the cuckoo. He flapped his wings and was silent for a minute or two. "I'll consider about it," he observed at last.

"Thank you," said Griselda, not exactly knowing what else to say.

"And in the meantime," continued the cuckoo, "you'd better obey present orders and go back to bed."

"Shall I say good-night to you, then?" asked Griselda somewhat timidly.

"You're quite welcome to do so," replied the cuckoo. "Why shouldn't you?"

"You see I wasn't sure if you would like it," returned Griselda, "for of course you're not like a person, and—and—I've been told all sorts of queer things about what fairies like and don't like."

"Who said I was a fairy?" inquired the cuckoo.

"Dorcus did, and, *of course*, my own common sense did too," replied Griselda. "You must be a fairy—you couldn't be anything else."

"I might be a fairyfied cockoo," suggested the bird.

Griselda looked puzzled.

"I don't understand," she said, "and I don't think it could make much difference. But whatever you are, I wish you would tell me one thing."

"What?" said the cuckoo.

"I want to know, now that you've forgiven me for throwing the book at you, have you come back for good?"

"Certainly not for evil," replied the cuckoo.

Griselda gave a little wriggle. "Cuckoo, you're laughing at me," she said. "I mean, have you come back to stay and cuckoo as usual and make my aunts happy again?"

"You'll see in the morning," said the cuckoo. "Now go off to bed."

"Good-night," said Griselda, "and thank you, and please don't forget to let me know when you've considered."

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," was her little friend's reply. Griselda thought it was meant for good-night, but the fact of the matter was that at that exact second of time it was two o'clock in the morning.

She made her way back to bed. She had been standing some time, talking to the cuckoo, but, though it was now well on in November, she did not feel the least cold, nor sleepy! She felt as happy and light-hearted as possible, and she wished it was morning, that she might get up. Yet the moment she laid her little brown curly head on the pillow, she fell asleep; and it seemed to her that just as she dropped off a soft feathery wing brushed her cheek gently and a tiny "Cuckoo" sounded in her ear.

When she woke it was bright morning, really bright morning, for the wintry sun was already sending some clear yellow rays out into the pale gray-blue sky.

"It must be late," thought Griselda, when she had opened the shutters and seen how light it was. "I must have slept a long time. I feel so beautifully unsleepy now. I must dress quickly—how nice it will be to see my aunts look happy again! I don't even care if they scold me for being late."

But, after all, it was not so much later than usual; it was only a much brighter morning than they had had for some time. Griselda did dress herself very quickly, however. As she went downstairs two or three of the clocks in the house, for there were several, were striking eight. These clocks must have been a little before the right time, for it was not till they had again relapsed into silence that there rang out from the ante-room the clear sweet tones, eight times repeated, of "Cuckoo."

Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha were already at the breakfast-table, but they received their little niece most graciously. Nothing

was said about the clock, however, till about half-way through the meal, when Griselda, full of eagerness to know if her aunts were aware of the cuckoo's return, could restrain herself no longer.

"Aunt Grizzel," she said, "isn't the cuckoo all right again?"

"Yes, my dear. I am delighted to say it is," replied Miss Grizzel.

"Did you get it put right, Aunt Grizzel?" inquired Griselda, slyly.

"Little girls should not ask so many questions," replied Miss Grizzel, mysteriously. "It *is* all right again, and that is enough. During fifty years that cuckoo has never, till yesterday, missed an hour. If you, in your sphere, my dear, do as well during fifty years, you won't have done badly."

"No, indeed, you won't have done badly," repeated Miss Tabitha.

But though the two old ladies thus tried to improve the occasion by a little lecturing, Griselda could see that at the bottom of their hearts they were both so happy that, even if she had been very naughty indeed, they could hardly have made up their minds to scold her.

She was not at all inclined to be naughty this day. She had something to think about and look forward to, which made her quite a different little girl, and made her take heart in doing her lessons as well as she possibly could.

"I wonder when the cuckoo will have considered enough about my having no one to play with?" she said to herself, as she was walking up and down the terrace at the back of the house.

"Caw, caw!" screamed a rook just over her head, as if in answer to her thought.

Griselda looked up at him.

"Your voice isn't half so pretty as the cuckoo's, Mr. Rook," she said. "All the same, I dare say I should make friends with you, if I understood what you meant. How funny it would be

to know all the languages of the birds and the beasts, like the prince in the fairy tale! I wonder if I should wish for that, if a fairy gave me a wish? No, I don't think I would. I'd *far* rather have the fairy carpet that would take you anywhere you liked in a minute. I'd go to China to see if all the people there looked like Aunt Grizzel's mandarins; and I'd first of all, of course, go to *fairyland*."

"You must come in now, little missie," said Dorcas's voice. "Miss Grizzel says you have had play enough, and there's a nice fire in the ante-room for you to do your lessons by."

"Play!" repeated Griselda indignantly, as she turned to follow the old servant. "Do you call walking up and down the terrace 'play,' Dorcas? I mustn't loiter even to pick a flower, if there were any, for fear of catching cold, and I mustn't run for fear of overheating myself. I declare, Dorcas, if I don't have some play soon, or something to amuse me, I think I'll run away."

"Nay, nay, missie, don't talk like that. You'd never do anything so naughty, and you so like Miss Sybilla, who was so good."

"Dorcas, I'm tired of being told I'm like Miss Sybilla," said Griselda, impatiently. "She was my grandmother; no one would like to be told they were like their grandmother. It makes me feel as if my face must be all screwy up and wrinkly, and as if I should have spectacles on and a wig."

"*That* is not like what Miss Sybilla was when I first saw her," said Dorcas. "She was younger than you, missie, and as pretty as a fairy."

"*Was* she?" exclaimed Griselda, stopping short.

"Yes, indeed she was. She might have been a fairy, so sweet she was and gentle—and yet so merry. Every creature loved her; even the animals about seemed to know her, as if she was one of themselves. She brought good luck to the house, and it was a sad day when she left it."

"I thought you said it was the cuckoo that brought good luck?" said Griselda.

"Well, so it was. The cuckoo and Miss Sybilla came here the same day. It was left to her by her mother's father, with whom she had lived since she was a baby, and when he died she came here to her sisters. She wasn't *own* sister to my ladies, you see, missie. Her mother had come from Germany, and it was in some strange place there, where her grandfather lived, that the cuckoo clock was made. They make wonderful clocks there, I've been told, but none more wonderful than our cuckoo, I'm sure."

"No, I'm *sure* not," said Griselda, softly. "Why didn't Miss Sybilla take it with her when she was married and went away?"

"She knew her sisters were so fond of it. It was like a memory of her left behind for them. It was like a part of her. And do you know, missie, the night she died—she died soon after your father was born, a year after she was married—for a whole hour, from twelve to one, that cuckoo went on cuckooing in a soft, sad way, like some living creature in trouble. Of course, we did not know anything was wrong with her, and folks said something had caught some of the springs of the works; but *I* didn't think so, and never shall. And——"

But here Dorcas's reminiscences were abruptly brought to a close by Miss Grizzel's appearance at the other end of the terrace.

"Griselda, what are you loitering so for? Dorcas, you should have hastened, not delayed Miss Griselda."

So Griselda was hurried off to her lessons, and Dorcas to her kitchen. But Griselda did not much mind. She had plenty to think of and wonder about, and she liked to do her lessons in the ante-room, with the tick-tock of the clock in her ears, and the feeling that *perhaps* the cuckoo was watching her through some invisible peep-hole in his closed doors.

"And if he sees," thought Griselda, "if he sees how hard

I am trying to do my lessons well, it will perhaps make him be quick about 'considering.' "

So she did try very hard. And she didn't speak to the cuckoo when he came out to say it was four o'clock. She was busy, and he was busy. She felt it was better to wait till he gave her some sign of being ready to talk to her again.

For fairies, you know, children, however charming, are sometimes *rather* queer to have to do with. They don't like to be interfered with, or treated except with very great respect, and they have their own ideas about what is proper and what isn't, I can assure you.

I suppose it was with working so hard at her lessons—most people would say it was with having been up the night before, running about the house in the moonlight; but as she had never felt so "fresh" in her life as when she got up that morning, it could hardly have been that—that Griselda felt so tired and sleepy that evening, she could hardly keep her eyes open. She begged to go to bed quite half an hour earlier than usual, which made Miss Tabitha afraid again that she was going to be ill. But there is nothing better for children than to go to bed early, even if they *are* going to be ill, Miss Grizzel told her to say good-night, and to ask Dorcas to give her a wine-glassful of elderberry wine, nice and hot after she was in bed.

Griselda had no objections to the elderberry wine, though she felt she was having it on false pretences. She certainly did not need it to send her to sleep, for almost before her head touched the pillow she was as sound as a top. She had slept a good long while, when again she wakened suddenly—just as she had done the night before, and again with the feeling that something had wakened her. And the queer thing was that the moment she was awake she felt so *very* awake—she had no inclination to stretch and yawn and hope it wasn't quite time to get up, and think how nice and warm bed was, and how cold it was out-

side! She sat straight up, and peered out into the darkness, feeling quite ready for an adventure.

“Is it you, cuckoo?” she said softly.

There was no answer, but listening intently, the child fancied she heard a faint rustling or fluttering in the corner of the room by the door. She got up and, feeling her way, opened it, and the instant she had done so she heard, a few steps only in front of her it seemed, the familiar notes, very, *very* soft and whispered, “Cuckoo, cuckoo.”

It went on and on, down the passage, Griselda trotting after. There was no moon to-night, heavy clouds had quite hidden it, and outside the rain was falling heavily. Griselda could hear it on the window-panes, through the closed shutters and all. But dark as it was, she made her way along without any difficulty, down the passage, across the great saloon, in through the ante-room, guided only by the little voice now and then to be heard in front of her. She came to a standstill right before the clock, and stood there for a minute or two patiently waiting.

She had not very long to wait. There came the usual murmuring sound, then the doors above the clock face opened—she heard them open, it was far too dark to see—and in his ordinary voice, clear and distinct (it was just two o'clock, so the cuckoo was killing two birds with one stone, telling the hour and greeting Griselda at once), the bird sang out, “Cuckoo, cuckoo.”

“Good evening, cuckoo,” said Griselda, when he had finished.

“Good morning, you mean,” said the cuckoo.

“Good morning, then, cuckoo,” said Griselda. “Have you considered about me, cuckoo?”

The cuckoo cleared his throat.

“Have you learnt to obey orders yet, Griselda?” he inquired.

“I’m trying,” replied Griselda. “But you see, cuckoo, I’ve not had very long to learn in—it was only last night you told me, you know.”

The cuckoo sighed.

"You've a great deal to learn, Griselda."

"I dare say I have," she said. "But I can tell you one thing, cuckoo—whatever lessons I have, I *couldn't* ever have any worse than those addition sums of Mr. Kneebreeches'. I have made up my mind about that, for to-day, do you know, cuckoo——"

"Yesterday," corrected the cuckoo. "Always be exact in your statements, Griselda."

"Well, yesterday, then," said Griselda, rather tartly; "though when you know quite well what I mean, I don't see that you need be so *very* particular. Well, as I was saying, I tried and *tried*, but still they were fearful. They were, indeed."

"You've a great deal to learn, Griselda," repeated the cuckoo.

"I wish you wouldn't say that so often," said Griselda. "I thought you were going to *play* with me."

"There's something in that," said the cuckoo, "there's something in that. I should like to talk about it. But we could talk more comfortably if you would come up here and sit beside me."

Griselda thought her friend must be going out of his mind.

"Sit beside you up there!" she exclaimed. "Cuckoo, how *could* I? I'm far, far too big."

"Big!" returned the cuckoo. "What do you mean by big? It's all a matter of fancy. Don't you know that if the world and everything in it, counting yourself of course, was all made little enough to go into a walnut, you'd never find out the difference?"

"*Wouldn't* I?" said Griselda, feeling rather muddled; "but, *not* counting myself, cuckoo, I would then, *wouldn't* I?"

"Nonsense," said the cuckoo hastily, "you've a great deal to learn, and one thing is, not to *argue*. Nobody should argue; it's a shocking bad habit, and ruins the digestion. Come up here and sit beside me comfortably. Catch hold of the chain; you'll find you can manage if you try."

"But it'll stop the clock," said Griselda. "Aunt Grizzel said I was never to touch the weights or the chains."

"Stuff," said the cuckoo; "it won't stop the clock. Catch hold of the chains and swing yourself up. There now—I told you you could manage it."

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNTRY OF THE NODDING MANDARINS

"We're all nodding, nid-nid-nodding."

How she managed it she never knew; but, somehow or other, it *was* managed. She seemed to slide up the chain just as easily as in a general way she would have slidden down, only without any disagreeable anticipation of a bump at the end of the journey. And when she got to the top how wonderfully different it looked from anything she could have expected! The doors stood open, and Griselda found them quite big enough, or herself quite small enough—which it was she couldn't tell, and as it was all a matter of fancy she decided not to trouble to inquire—to pass through quite comfortably.

And inside there was the most charming little snuggery imaginable. It was something like a saloon railway carriage—it seemed to be all lined and carpeted and everything, with rich mossy red velvet; there was a little round table in the middle and two arm-chairs, on one of which sat the cuckoo—"quite like other people," thought Griselda to herself—while the other, as he pointed out to Griselda by a little nod, was evidently intended for her.

"Thank you," said she; sitting down on the chair as she spoke.

"Are you comfortable?" inquired the cuckoo.

"Quite," replied Griselda, looking about her with great satis-

faction. "Are all cuckoo clocks like this when you get up inside them?" she inquired. "I can't think how there's room for this dear little place between the clock and the wall. Is it a hole cut out of the wall on purpose, cuckoo?"

"Hush!" said the cuckoo, "we've got other things to talk about. First, shall I lend you one of my mantles? You may feel cold."

"I don't just now," replied Griselda; "but perhaps I *might*."

She looked at her little bare feet as she spoke and wondered why *they* weren't cold, for it was very chilblainy weather.

The cuckoo stood up, and with one of his claws reached from a corner where it was hanging a cloak which Griselda had not before noticed. For it was hanging wrong side out, and the lining was red velvet, very like what the sides of the little room were covered with, so it was no wonder she had not noticed it.

Had it been hanging the *right* side out she must have done so; this side was so *very* wonderful!

It was all feathers—feathers of every shade and colour, but beautifully worked in, somehow, so as to lie quite smoothly and evenly, one colour melting away into another like those in a prism, so that you could hardly tell where one began and another ended.

"What a *lovely* cloak!" said Griselda, wrapping it round her and feeling even more comfortable than before, as she watched the rays of the little lamp in the roof—I think I was forgetting to tell you that the cuckoo's boudoir was lighted by a dear little lamp set into the red velvet roof like a pearl in a ring—playing softly on the brilliant colours of the feather mantle.

"It's better than *lovely*," said the cuckoo, "as you shall see. Now, Griselda," he continued, in the tone of one coming to business—"now, Griselda, let us talk."

"We have been talking," said Griselda, "ever so long. I am very comfortable. When you say 'let us talk' like that, it makes me forget all I wanted to say. Just let me sit still and say whatever comes into my head."

"That won't do," said the cuckoo; "we must have a plan of action."

"A what?" said Griselda.

"You see you *have* a great deal to learn," said the cuckoo triumphantly. "You don't understand what I say."

"But I didn't come up here to learn," said Griselda; "I can do that down there"; and she nodded her head in the direction of the ante-room table. "I want to play."

"Just so," said the cuckoo; "that's what I want to talk about. What do you call 'play'—blind-man's-buff and that sort of thing?"

"No," said Griselda, considering. "I'm getting rather too big for that kind of play. Besides, cuckoo, you and I alone couldn't have much fun at blindman's-buff; there'd be only me to catch you or you to catch me."

"Oh, we could easily get more," said the cuckoo. "The mandarins would be pleased to join."

"The mandarins!" repeated Griselda. "Why, cuckoo, they're not alive! How could they play?"

The cuckoo looked at her gravely for a minute, then shook his head.

"You have a *great* deal to learn," he said solemnly. "Don't you know that *everything's* alive?"

"No," said Griselda, "I don't; and I don't know what you mean, and I don't think I want to know what you mean. I want to talk about playing."

"Well," said the cuckoo, "talk."

"What I call playing," pursued Griselda, "is—I have thought about it now, you see—is being amused. If you will amuse me, cuckoo, I will count that you are playing with me."

"How shall I amuse you?" inquired he.

"Oh, that's for you to find out!" exclaimed Griselda. "You might tell me fairy stories, you know: if you're a fairy you should know lots; or—oh, yes, of course that would be far nicer—if you are a fairy you might take me with you to fairyland."

Again the cuckoo shook his head.

“That,” said he, “I cannot do.”

“Why not?” said Griselda. “Lots of children have been there.”

“I doubt it,” said the cuckoo. “*Some* may have been, but not lots. And some may have thought they had been there who hadn’t really been there at all. And as to those who have been there, you may be sure of one thing—they were not *taken*, they found their own way. No one ever was *taken* to fairyland—to the real fairyland. They may have been taken to the neighbouring countries, but not to fairyland itself.”

“And how is one ever to find one’s own way there?” asked Griselda.

“That I cannot tell you either,” replied the cuckoo. “There are many roads there; you may find yours some day. And if ever you do find it, be sure you keep what you see of it well swept and clean, and then you may see further after a while. Ah, yes, there are many roads and many doors into fairyland!”

“Doors!” cried Griselda. “Are there any doors into fairyland in this house?”

“Several,” said the cuckoo; “but don’t waste your time looking for them at present. It would be no use.”

“Then how will you amuse me?” inquired Griselda, in a rather disappointed tone.

“Don’t you care to go anywhere except to fairyland?” said the cuckoo.

“Oh yes, there are lots of places I wouldn’t mind seeing. Not geography sort of places—it would be just like lessons to go to India and Africa and all those places—but *queer* places, like the mines where the goblins make diamonds and precious stones, and the caves down under the sea where the mermaids live. And—oh, I’ve just thought—now I’m so nice and little, I *would* like to go all over the mandarins’ palace in the great saloon.”

“That can be easily managed,” said the cuckoo; “but—ex-

cuse me for an instant," he exclaimed suddenly. He gave a spring forward and disappeared. Then Griselda heard his voice outside the doors. "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo." It was three o'clock.

The doors opened again to let him through, and he resettled himself on his chair. "As I was saying," he went on, "nothing could be easier. But that palace, as you call it, has an entrance on the other side, as well as the one you know."

"Another door, do you mean?" said Griselda. "How funny! Does it go through the wall? And where does it lead to?"

"It leads," replied the cuckoo, "it leads to the country of the Nodding Mandarins."

"*What fun!*" exclaimed Griselda, clapping her hands. "Cuckoo, do let us go there. How can we get down? You can fly, but must I slide down the chain again?"

"Oh, dear, no," said the cuckoo, "by no means. You have only to stretch out your feather mantle, flap it as if it was wings—so"—he flapped his own wings encouragingly—"wish, and there you'll be."

"Where?" said Griselda bewilderedly.

"Wherever you wish to be, of course," said the cuckoo. "Are you ready? Here goes."

"Wait—wait a moment," cried Griselda. "Where am I to wish to be?"

"Bless the child!" exclaimed the cuckoo. "Where *do* you wish to be; You said you wanted to visit the country of the Nodding Mandarins."

"Yes; but am I to wish first to be in the palace in the great saloon?"

"Certainly," replied the cuckoo. "That is the entrance to Mandarin Land, and you said you would like to see through it. So—you're surely ready now?"

"A thought has just struck me," said Griselda. "How will you know what o'clock it is, so as to come back in time to tell the next hour? My aunts will get into such a fright if you go

wrong again! Are you sure we shall have time to go to the mandarins' country to-night?"

"Time!" repeated the cuckoo; "what is time? Ah, Griselda, you have a *very* great deal to learn! What do you mean by time?"

"I don't know," replied Griselda, feeling rather snubbed. "Being slow or quick—I suppose that's what I mean."

"And what is slow, and what is quick?" said the cuckoo. "All a matter of fancy! If everything that's been done since the world was made till now, was done over again in five minutes, you'd never know the difference."

"Oh, cuckoo, I wish you wouldn't!" cried poor Griselda; "you're worse than sums, you do so puzzle me. It's like what you said about nothing being big or little, only it's worse. Where would all the days and hours be if there was nothing but minutes? Oh, cuckoo, you said you'd amuse me, and you do nothing but puzzle me."

"It was your own fault. You wouldn't get ready," said the cuckoo. "Now, here goes! Flap and wish."

Griselda flapped and wished. She felt a sort of rustle in the air, that was all—then she found herself standing with the cuckoo in front of the Chinese cabinet, the door of which stood open, while the mandarins on each side, nodding politely, seemed to invite them to enter. Griselda hesitated.

"Go on," said the cuckoo, patronizingly; "ladies first."

Griselda went on. To her surprise, inside the cabinet it was quite light, though where the light came from that illuminated all the queer corners and recesses and streamed out to the front, where stood the mandarins, she could not discover.

The "palace" was not quite as interesting as she had expected. There were lots of little rooms in it opening on to balconies commanding, no doubt, a splendid view of the great saloon; there were ever so many little staircases leading to more little rooms and balconies; but it all seemed empty and deserted.

"I don't care for it," said Griselda, stopping short at last; "it's all the same, and there's nothing to see. I thought my aunts kept ever so many beautiful things in here, and there's nothing."

"Come along then," said the cuckoo. "I didn't expect you'd care for the palace as you called it, much. Let us go out the other way."

He hopped down a sort of little staircase near which they were standing, and Griselda followed him willingly enough. At the foot they found themselves in a vestibule, much handsomer than the entrance at the other side, and the cuckoo, crossing it, lifted one of his claws and touched a spring in the wall. Instantly a pair of large doors flew open in the middle, revealing to Griselda the prettiest and most curious sight she had ever seen.

A flight of wide shallow steps led down from this doorway into a long, long avenue bordered by stiffly growing trees, from the branches of which hung innumerable lamps of every colour, making a perfect network of brilliance as far as the eye could reach.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Griselda, clapping her hands. "It'll be like walking along a rainbow. Cuckoo, come quick."

"Stop," said the cuckoo; "we've a good way to go. There's no need to walk. Palanquin!"

He flapped his wings, and instantly a palanquin appeared at the foot of the steps. It was made of carved ivory, and borne by four Chinese-looking figures with pigtails and bright-coloured jackets. A feeling came over Griselda that she was dreaming, or else that she had seen this palanquin before. She hesitated. Suddenly she gave a little jump of satisfaction.

"I know," she exclaimed. "It's exactly like the one that stands under a glass shade on Lady Lavander's drawing-room mantelpiece. I wonder if it is the very one? Fancy me being able to get *into* it."

She looked at the four bearers. Instantly they all nodded.
“What do they mean?” asked Griselda, turning to the cuckoo.
“Get in,” he replied.

“Yes, I’m just going to get in,” she said; “but what do *they* mean when they nod at me like that?”

“They mean, of course, what I tell you—‘Get in,’ ” said the cuckoo.

“Why don’t they say so, then?” persisted Griselda, getting in, however, as she spoke.

“Griselda, you have a *very* great——” began the cuckoo, but Griselda interrupted him.

“Cuckoo,” she exclaimed, “if you say that again, I’ll jump out of the palanquin and run away home to bed. Of course I’ve a great deal to learn—that’s why I like to ask questions about everything I see. Now, tell me where we are going.”

“In the first place,” said the cuckoo, “are you comfortable?”

“Very,” said Griselda, settling herself down among the cushions.

It was a change from the cuckoo’s boudoir. There were no chairs or seats, only a number of very, *very* soft cushions covered with green silk. There were green silk curtains all round, too, which you could draw or not as you pleased, just by touching a spring. Griselda stroked the silk gently. It was not “fruzzley” silk, if you know what that means; it did not make you feel as if your nails wanted cutting, or as if all the rough places on your skin were being rubbed up the wrong way; its softness was like that of a rose or pansy petal.

“What nice silk!” said Griselda. “I’d like a dress of it. I never noticed that the palanquin was lined so nicely,” she continued, “for I suppose it *is* the one from Lady Lavander’s mantelpiece? There couldn’t be two so exactly like each other.”

The cuckoo gave a sort of whistle.

“What a goose you are, my dear!” he exclaimed. “Excuse me,” he continued, seeing that Griselda looked rather offended;

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but you won't let me say the other thing, you know. The palanquin from Lady Lavander's! I should think not. You might as well mistake one of those horrible paper roses that Dorcas sticks in her vases for one of your aunt's *Gloires de Dijon*! The palanquin from Lady Lavander's—a clumsy human imitation not worth looking at!"

"I didn't know," said Griselda humbly. "Do they make such beautiful things in *Mandarin Land*?"

"Of course," said the cuckoo.

Griselda sat silent for a minute or two, but very soon she recovered her spirits.

"Will you please tell me where we are going?" she asked again.

"You'll see directly," said the cuckoo; "not that I mind telling you. There's to be a grand reception at one of the palaces to-night. I thought you'd like to assist at it. It'll give you some idea of what a palace is like. By-the-by, can you dance?"

"A little," replied Griselda.

"Ah, well, I dare say you will manage. I've ordered a court dress for you. It will be all ready when we get there."

In a minute or two the palanquin stopped. The cuckoo got out, and Griselda followed him.

She found that they were at the entrance to a *very* much grander palace than the one in her aunt's saloon. The steps leading up to the door were very wide and shallow, and covered with a gold embroidered carpet, which *looked* as if it would be prickly to her bare feet, but which, on the contrary, when she trod upon it, felt softer than the softest moss. She could see very little besides the carpet, for at each side of the steps stood rows and rows of mandarins, all something like, but a great deal grander than the pair outside her aunt's cabinet; and as the cuckoo hopped and Griselda walked up the staircase, they all, in turn, row by row, began solemnly to nod. It gave them the look

of a field of very high grass, through which any one passing leaves for the moment a trail, till all the heads bob up again into their places.

“What do they mean?” whispered Griselda.

“It’s a royal salute,” said the cuckoo.

“A salute!” said Griselda. “I thought that meant kissing or guns.”

“Hush” said the cuckoo, for by this time they had arrived at the top of the staircase; “you must be dressed now.”

Two mandariny-looking young ladies, with porcelain faces and three-cornered head-dresses, stepped forward and led Griselda into a small ante-room, where lay waiting for her the most magnificent dress you ever saw. But how *do* you think they dressed her? It was all by nodding. They nodded to the blue and silver embroidered jacket, and in a moment it had fitted itself on to her. They nodded to the splendid scarlet satin skirt, made very short in front and very long behind, and before Griselda knew where she was, it was adjusted quite correctly. They nodded to the head-dress, and the sashes, and the necklaces and bracelets, and forthwith they all arranged themselves. Last of all, they nodded to the dearest, sweetest little pair of high-heeled shoes imaginable—all silver, and blue, and gold, and scarlet, and everything mixed up together, *only* they were rather a stumpy shape about the toes, and Griselda’s bare feet were encased in them, and, to her surprise, quite comfortably so.

“They don’t hurt me a bit,” she said aloud; “yet they didn’t look the least shape of my foot.”

But her attendants only nodded; and turning round, she saw the cuckoo waiting for her. He did not speak either, rather to her annoyance, but gravely led the way through one grand room after another to the grandest of all, where the entertainment was evidently just about to begin. And everywhere there were mandarins, rows and rows, who all set to work nodding as fast as Griselda appeared. She began to be rather tired of royal

salutes, and was glad when, at last, in profound silence, the procession, consisting of the cuckoo and herself, and about half a dozen "mandarins," came to a halt before a kind of dais, or raised seat, at the end of the hall.

Upon this dais stood a chair—a throne of some kind, Griselda supposed it to be—and upon this was seated the grandest and gravest personage she had yet seen.

"Is he the king of the mandarins?" she whispered. But the cuckoo did not reply; and before she had time to repeat the question, the very grand and grave person got down from his seat, and coming towards her, offered her his hand, at the same time nodding—first once, then two or three times together, then once again. Griselda seemed to know what he meant. He was asking her to dance.

"Thank you," she said. "I can't dance *very* well, but perhaps you won't mind."

The king, if that was his title, took not the slightest notice of her reply, but nodded again—once, then two or three times together, then once alone, just as before. Griselda did not know what to do, when suddenly she felt something poking her head. It was the cuckoo—he had lifted his claw, and was tapping her head to make her nod. So she nodded—once, twice together, then once—that appeared to be enough. The king nodded once again; an invisible band suddenly struck up the loveliest music, and off they set to the places of honour reserved for them in the centre of the room, where all the mandarins were assembling.

What a dance that was! It began like a minuet and ended something like the hay-makers. Griselda had not the least idea what the figures or steps were, but it did not matter. If she did not know, her shoes or something about her did; for she got on famously. The music was lovely—"so the mandarins can't be deaf, though they are dumb," thought Griselda, "which is one good thing about them." The king seemed to enjoy it as much as she did, though he never smiled or laughed; any one

could have seen he liked it by the way he whirled and twirled himself about. And between the figures, when they stopped to rest for a little, Griselda got on very well too. There was no conversation, or rather, if there was, it was all nodding.

So Griselda nodded too, and though she did not know what her nods meant, the king seemed to understand and be quite pleased; and when they had nodded enough the music struck up again, and off they set, harder than before.

And every now and then tiny little mandariny boys appeared with trays filled with the most delicious fruits and sweetmeats. Griselda was not a greedy child, but for once in her life she really *did* feel rather so. I cannot possibly describe these delicious things; just think of whatever in all your life was the most "lovely" thing you ever ate, and you may be sure they tasted like that. Only the cuckoo would not eat any, which rather distressed Griselda. He walked about among the dancers, apparently quite at home; and the mandarins did not seem at all surprised to see him, though he did look rather odd, being nearly, if not quite, as big as any of them. Griselda hoped he was enjoying herself, considering that she had to thank him for all the fun *she* was having, but she felt a little conscience-stricken when she saw that he wouldn't eat anything.

"Cuckoo," she whispered; she dared not talk out loud—it would have seemed so remarkable, you see. "Cuckoo," she said, very, very softly, "I wish you would eat something. You'll be so tired and hungry."

"No, thank you," said the cuckoo; and you can't think how pleased Griselda was at having succeeded in making him speak. "It isn't my way. I hope you are enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, *very* much," said Griselda. "I—"

"Hush!" said the cuckoo; and looking up, Griselda saw a number of mandarins, in a sort of procession, coming their way.

When they got up to the cuckoo they set to work nodding, two or three at a time, more energetically than usual. When they

stopped, the cuckoo nodded in return, and then hopped off towards the middle of the room.

“They’re very fond of good music, you see,” he whispered as he passed Griselda; “and they don’t often get it.”

CHAPTER V

PICTURES

“And she is always beautiful,
And always is eighteen!”

WHEN he got to the middle of the room the cuckoo cleared his throat, flapped his wings, and began to sing. Griselda was quite astonished. She had had no idea that her friend was so accomplished. It wasn’t “cuckooing” at all; it was real singing, like that of the nightingale or the thrush, or like something prettier than either. It made Griselda think of woods in summer, and of tinkling brooks flowing through them, with the pretty brown pebbles sparkling up through the water; and then it made her think of something sad—she didn’t know what; perhaps it was of the babes in the wood and the robins covering them up with leaves—and then again, in a moment, it sounded as if all the merry elves and sprites that ever were heard of had escaped from fairyland, and were rolling over and over with peals of rollicking laughter. And at last, all of a sudden, the song came to an end.

“Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!” rang out three times, clear and shrill. The cuckoo flapped his wings, made a bow to the mandarins, and retired to his old corner.

There was no buzz of talk, as is usual after a performance has come to a close, but there was a great buzz of nodding, and Griselda, wishing to give the cuckoo as much praise as she could, nodded as hard as any of them. The cuckoo really looked quite shy at receiving so much applause. But in a minute or two the

music struck up and the dancing began again—one, two, three: it seemed a sort of mazurka this time, which suited the mandarins very well, as it gave them a chance of nodding to mark the time.

Griselda had once learnt the mazurka, so she got on even better than before—only she would have liked it more if her shoes had had sharper toes; they looked so stumpy when she tried to point them. All the same, it was very good fun, and she was not too well pleased when she suddenly felt the little sharp tap of the cuckoo on her head, and heard him whisper—

“Griselda, it’s time to go.”

“Oh dear, why?” she asked. “I’m not a bit tired. Why need we go yet?”

“Obeying orders,” said the cuckoo; and after that, Griselda dared not say another word. It was very nearly as bad as being told she had a great deal to learn.

“Must I say good-bye to the king and all the people?” she inquired; but before the cuckoo had time to answer, she gave a little squeal. “Oh, cuckoo,” she cried, “you’ve trod on my foot.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the cuckoo.

“I must take off my shoe; it does so hurt,” she went on.

“Take it off, then,” said the cuckoo.

Griselda stooped to take off her shoe. “Are we going home in the pal——?” she began to say; but she never finished the sentence, for just as she had got her shoe off she felt the cuckoo throw something round her. It was the feather mantle.

And Griselda knew nothing more till she opened her eyes the next morning, and saw the first early rays of sunshine peeping in through the chinks of the closed shutters of her little bedroom.

She rubbed her eyes, and sat up in bed. Could it have been a dream.

“What could have made me fall asleep so all of a sudden?” she thought. “I wasn’t the least sleepy at the mandarins’ ball.

What fun it was! I believe that cuckoo made me fall asleep on purpose to make me fancy it was a dream. *Was* it a dream?"

She began to feel confused and doubtful, when suddenly she felt something hurting her arm, like a little lump in the bed. She felt with her hand to see if she could smooth it away, and drew out—one of the shoes belonging to her court dress! The very one she had held in her hand at the moment the cuckoo spirited her home again to bed.

"Ah, Mr. Cuckoo!" she exclaimed, "you meant to play me a trick, but you haven't succeeded, you see."

She jumped out of bed and unfastened one of the window-shutters, then jumped in again to admire the little shoe in comfort. It was even prettier than she had thought it at the ball. She held it up and looked at it. It was about the size of the first joint of her little finger. "To think that I should have been dancing with you on last night!" she said to the shoe. "And yet the cuckoo says being big or little is all a matter of fancy. I wonder what he'll think of to amuse me next?"

She was still holding up the shoe and admiring it when Dorcas came with the hot water.

"Look, Dorcas," she said.

"Bless me, it's one of the shoes off the Chinese dolls in the saloon," exclaimed the old servant. "How ever did you get that, missie? Your aunts wouldn't be pleased."

"It just isn't one of the Chinese dolls' shoes, and if you don't believe me, you can go and look for yourself," said Griselda. "It's my very own shoe, and it was given me to my own self."

Dorcas looked at her curiously, but said no more, only as she was going out of the room Griselda heard her saying something about "so very like Miss Sybilla."

"I wonder what 'Miss Sybilla' *was* like?" thought Griselda. "I have a good mind to ask the cuckoo. He seems to have known her very well."

It was not for some days that Griselda had a chance of asking

the cuckoo anything. She saw and heard nothing of him—nothing, that is to say, but his regular appearance to tell the hours as usual.

“I suppose,” thought Griselda, “he thinks the mandarins’ ball was fun enough to last me a good while. It really was very good-natured of him to take me to it, so I mustn’t grumble.”

A few days after this poor Griselda caught cold. It was not a very bad cold, I confess, but her aunts made rather a fuss about it. They wanted her to stay in bed, but to this Griselda so much objected that they did not insist upon it.

“It would be so dull,” she said piteously. “Please let me stay in the ante-room, for all my things are there; and, then, there’s the cuckoo.”

Aunt Grizzel smiled at this, and Griselda got her way. But even in the ante-room it was rather dull. Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha were obliged to go out, to drive all the way to Merry-brow Hall, as Lady Lavander sent a messenger to say that she had an attack of influenza, and wished to see her friends at once.

Miss Tabitha began to cry—she was so tender-hearted.

“Troubles never come singly,” said Miss Grizzel, by way of consolation.

“No, indeed, they never come singly,” said Miss Tabitha, shaking her head and wiping her eyes.

So off they set; and Griselda, in her arm-chair by the ante-room fire, with some queer little old-fashioned books of her aunts’, which she had already read more than a dozen times, beside her by way of amusement, felt that there was one comfort in her troubles—she had escaped the long weary drive to her godmother’s.

But it was very dull. It got duller and duller. Griselda curled herself up in her chair, and wished she could go to sleep, though feeling quite sure she couldn’t, for she had stayed in bed much later than usual this morning, and had been obliged to spend the time in sleeping, for want of anything better to do.

She looked up at the clock.

"I don't know even what to wish for," she said to herself. "I don't feel the least inclined to play at anything, and I shouldn't care to go to the mandarins' again. Oh, cuckoo, cuckoo, I am so dull; couldn't you think of anything to amuse me?"

It was not near "any o'clock." But after waiting a minute or two, it seemed to Griselda that she heard the soft sound of "coming" that always preceded the cuckoo's appearance. She was right. In another moment she heard his usual greeting, "Cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"Oh, cuckoo!" she exclaimed, "I am so glad you have come at last. I *am* so dull, and it has nothing to do with lessons this time. It's that I've got such a bad cold, and my head's aching, and I'm so tired of reading, all by myself."

"What would you like to do?" said the cuckoo. "You don't want to go to see the mandarins again?"

"Oh no; I couldn't dance."

"Or the mermaids down under the sea?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Griselda, with a little shiver, "it would be far too cold. I would just like to stay where I am, if some one would tell me stories. I'm not even sure that I could listen to stories. What could you do to amuse me, cuckoo?"

"Would you like to see some pictures?" said the cuckoo. "I could show you pictures without your taking any trouble."

"Oh yes, that would be beautiful," cried Griselda. "What pictures will you show me? Oh, I know. I would like to see the place where you were born—where that very, very clever man made you and the clock, I mean."

"Your great-great-grandfather," said the cuckoo. "Very well. Now, Griselda, shut your eyes. First of all, I am going to sing."

Griselda shut her eyes, and the cuckoo began his song. It was something like what he had sung at the mandarins' palace,

only even more beautiful. It was so soft and dreamy, Griselda felt as if she could have sat there for ever, listening to it.

The first notes were low and murmuring. Again they made Griselda think of little rippling brooks in summer, and now and then there came a sort of hum as of insects buzzing in the warm sunshine near. This humming gradually increased, till at last Griselda was conscious of nothing more—*everything* seemed to be humming, herself too, till at last she fell asleep.

When she opened her eyes, the ante-room and everything in it, except the arm-chair on which she was still curled up, had disappeared—melted away into a misty cloud all round her, which in turn gradually faded, till before her she saw a scene quite new and strange. It was the first of the cuckoo's “pictures.”

An old, quaint room, with a high, carved mantelpiece, and a bright fire sparkling in the grate. It was not a pretty room—it had more the look of a workshop of some kind; but it was curious and interesting. All round, the walls were hung with clocks and strange mechanical toys. There was a fiddler slowly fiddling, a gentleman and lady gravely dancing a minuet, a little man drawing up water in a bucket out of a glass vase in which gold fish were swimming about—all sorts of queer figures; and the clocks were even queerer. There was one intended to represent the sun, moon, and planets, with one face for the sun and another for the moon, and gold and silver stars slowly circling round them; there was another clock with a tiny trumpeter perched on a ledge above the face, who blew a horn for the hours. I cannot tell you half the strange and wonderful things there were.

Griselda was so interested in looking at all these queer machines, that she did not for some time observe the occupant of the room. And no wonder; he was sitting in front of a little table, so perfectly still, much more still than the un-living figures around him. He was examining, with a magnifying glass, some small object he held in his hand, so closely and intently that

Griselda, forgetting she was only looking at a "picture," almost held her breath for fear she should disturb him. He was a very old man, his coat was worn and threadbare in several places, looking as if he spent a great part of his life in one position. Yet he did not look *poor*, and his face, when at last he lifted it, was mild and intelligent and very earnest.

While Griselda was watching him closely there came a soft tap at the door, and a little girl danced into the room. The dearest little girl you ever saw, and so funnily dressed! Her thick brown hair, rather lighter than Griselda's, was tied in two long plaits down her back. She had a short red skirt with silver braid round the bottom, and a white chemisette with beautiful lace at the throat and wrists, and over that again a black velvet bodice, also trimmed with silver. And she had a great many trinkets, necklaces, and bracelets, and ear-rings, and a sort of little silver coronet; no, it was not like a coronet, it was a band with a square piece of silver fastened so as to stand up at each side of her head something like a horse's blinkers, only they were not placed over her eyes.

She made quite a jingle as she came into the room, and the old man looked up with a smile of pleasure.

"Well, my darling, and are you all ready for your *fête*?" he said; and though the language in which he spoke was quite strange to Griselda, she understood his meaning perfectly well.

"Yes, dear grandfather; and isn't my dress lovely?" said the child. "I should be *so* happy if only you were coming too, and would get yourself a beautiful velvet coat like Mynheer van Huyten."

The old man shook his head.

"I have no time for such things, my darling," he replied; "and besides, I am too old. I must work—work hard to make money for my pet when I am gone, that she may not be dependent on the bounty of those English sisters."

"But I won't care for money when you are gone, grand-

father," said the child, her eyes filling with tears. "I would rather just go on living in this little house, and I am sure the neighbours would give me something to eat, and then I could hear all your clocks ticking, and think of you. I don't want you to sell all your wonderful things for money for me, grandfather. They would remind me of you, and money wouldn't."

"Not all, Sybilla not all," said the old man. "The best of all, the *chef-d'œuvre* of my life, shall not be sold. It shall be yours, and you will have in your possession a clock that crowned heads might seek in vain to purchase."

His dim old eyes brightened, and for a moment he sat erect and strong.

"Do you mean the cuckoo clock?" said Sybilla, in a low voice.

"Yes, my darling, the cuckoo clock, the crowning work of my life—a clock that shall last long after I, and perhaps thou, my pretty child, are crumbling into dust; a clock that shall last to tell my great-grandchildren to many generations that the old Dutch mechanic was not altogether to be despised."

Sybilla sprang into his arms.

"You are not to talk like that, little grandfather," she said. "I shall teach my children and my grandchildren to be so proud of you—oh, so proud!—as proud as I am of you, little grandfather."

"Gently, my darling," said the old man, as he placed carefully on the table the delicate piece of mechanism he held in his hand, and tenderly embraced the child. "Kiss me once again, my pet, and then thou must go; thy little friends will be waiting."

* * * * * *

As he said these words the mist slowly gathered again before Griselda's eyes—the first of the cuckoo's pictures faded from her sight.

* * * * * *

When she looked again the scene was changed, but this time it was not a strange one, though Griselda had gazed at it for some moments before she recognised it. It was the great saloon, but it looked very different from what she had ever seen it. Forty years or so make a difference in rooms as well as in people!

The faded yellow damask hangings were rich and brilliant. There were bouquets of lovely flowers arranged about the tables; wax lights were sending out their brightness in every direction, and the room was filled with ladies and gentlemen in gay attire.

Among them, after a time, Griselda remarked two ladies, no longer very young, but still handsome and stately, and something whispered to her that they were her two aunts, Miss Grizzel and Miss Tabitha.

“Poor aunts!” she said softly to herself; “how old they have grown since then.”

But she did not long look at them; her attention was attracted by a much younger lady—a mere girl she seemed, but oh, so sweet and pretty! She was dancing with a gentleman whose eyes looked as if they saw no one else, and she herself seemed brimming over with youth and happiness. Her very steps had joy in them.

“Well, Griselda,” whispered a voice, which she knew was the cuckoo’s; “so you don’t like to be told you are like your grandmother, eh?”

Griselda turned round sharply to look for the speaker, but he was not to be seen. And when she turned again, the picture of the great saloon had faded away.

* * * * *

One more picture.

Griselda looked again. She saw before her a country road in full summer time; the sun was shining, the birds were singing, the trees covered with their bright green leaves—everything appeared happy and joyful. But at last in the distance she saw,

slowly approaching, a group of a few people, all walking together, carrying in their centre something long and narrow, which, though the black cloth covering it was almost hidden by the white flowers with which it was thickly strewn, Griselda knew to be a coffin.

It was a funeral procession, and in the place of chief mourner, with pale, set face, walked the same young man whom Griselda had last seen dancing with the girl Sybilla in the great saloon.

The sad group passed slowly out of sight; but as it disappeared there fell upon the ear the sounds of sweet music, lovelier far than she had heard before—lovelier than the magic cuckoo's most lovely songs—and somehow, in the music, it seemed to the child's fancy there were mingled the soft strains of a woman's voice.

“It is Sybilla singing,” thought Griselda dreamily, and with that she fell asleep again.

* * * * * *

When she woke she was in the arm-chair by the ante-room fire, everything around her looking just as usual, the cuckoo clock ticking away calmly and regularly. Had it been a dream only? Griselda could not make up her mind.

“But I don't see that it matters if it was,” she said to herself. “If it was a dream, the cuckoo sent it to me all the same, and I thank you very much indeed, cuckoo,” she went on, looking up at the clock. “The last picture was rather sad, but still it was very nice to see it, and I thank you very much, and I'll never say again that I don't like to be told I'm like my dear pretty grandmother.”

The cuckoo took no notice of what she said, but Griselda did not mind. She was getting used to his “ways.”

“I expect he hears me quite well,” she thought; “and even if he doesn't, it's only civil to *try* to thank him.”

She sat still contentedly enough, thinking over what she had seen, and trying to make more “pictures” for herself in the fire.

Then there came faintly to her ears the sound of carriage wheels, opening and shutting of doors, a little bustle of arrival.

"My aunts must have come back," thought Griselda; and so it was. In a few minutes Miss Grizzel, closely followed by Miss Tabitha, appeared at the ante-room door.

"Well, my love," said Miss Grizzel anxiously, "and how are you? Has the time seemed very long while we were away?"

"Oh no, thank you, Aunt Grizzel," replied Griselda, "not at all. I've been quite happy, and my cold's ever so much better, and my headache's *quite* gone."

"Come, that is good news," said Miss Grizzel. "Not that I'm exactly *surprised*," she continued, turning to Miss Tabitha, "for there really is nothing like tansy tea for a feverish cold."

"Nothing," agreed Miss Tabitha; "there really is nothing like it."

"Aunt Grizzel," said Griselda, after a few moments' silence, "was my grandmother quite young when she died?"

"Yes, my love, very young," replied Miss Grizzel with a change in her voice.

"And was her husband *very* sorry?" pursued Griselda.

"Heart-broken," said Miss Grizzel. "He did not live long after, and then you know, my dear, your father was sent to us to take care of. And now he has sent *you*—the third generation of young creatures confided to our care."

"Yes," said Griselda. "My grandmother died in the summer, when all the flowers were out; and she was buried in a pretty country place, wasn't she?"

"Yes," said Miss Grizzel, looking rather bewildered.

"And when she was a little girl she lived with her grandfather, the old Dutch mechanic," continued Griselda, unconsciously using the very words she had heard in her vision. "He was a nice old man; and how clever of him to have made the cuckoo clock, and such lots of other pretty, wonderful things. I don't wonder little Sybilla loved him; he was so good to her."

But, oh, Aunt Grizzel, *how* pretty she was when she was a young lady! That time that she danced with my grandfather in the great saloon. And how very nice you and Aunt Tabitha looked then, too."

Miss Grizzel held her very breath in astonishment; and no doubt if Miss Tabitha had known she was doing so, she would have held hers too. But Griselda lay still, gazing at the fire, quite unconscious of her aunt's surprise.

"Your papa told you all these old stories, I suppose, my dear," said Miss Grizzel at last.

"Oh, no," said Griselda dreamily. "Papa never told me any thing like that. Dorcas told me a very little, I think; at least, she made me want to know, and I asked the cuckoo, and then, you see, he showed me it all. It was so pretty."

Miss Grizzel glanced at her sister.

"Tabitha, my dear," she said in a low voice, "do you hear?"

And Miss Tabitha, who really was not very deaf when she set herself to hear, nodded in awestruck silence.

"Tabitha," continued Miss Grizzel in the same tone, "it is wonderful! Ah, yes, how true it is, Tabitha, that 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy'" (for Miss Grizzel was a well-read old lady, you see); "and from the very first, Tabitha, we always had a feeling that the child was strangely like Sybilla."

"Strangely like Sybilla," echoed Miss Tabitha.

"May she grow up as good, if not quite as beautiful—that we could scarcely expect; and may she be longer spared to those that love her," added Miss Grizzel, bending over Griselda, while two or three tears slowly trickled down her aged cheeks. "See, Tabitha, the dear child is fast asleep. How sweet she looks! I trust by to-morrow morning she will be quite herself again; her cold is so much better."

CHAPTER VI

RUBBED THE WRONG WAY

“For now and then there comes a day
When everything goes wrong.”

GRISELDA’s cold *was* much better by “to-morrow morning.” In fact, I might almost say it was quite well.

But Griselda herself did not feel quite well, and saying this reminds me that it is hardly sense to speak of a *cold* being better or well—for a cold’s being “well” means that it is not there at all, out of existence, in short, and if a thing is out of existence how can we say anything about it? Children, I feel quite in a hobble—I cannot get my mind straight about it—please think it over and give me your opinion. In the meantime, I will go on about Griselda.

She felt just a little ill—a sort of feeling that sometimes is rather nice, sometimes “very extremely” much the reverse! She felt in the humour for being petted, and having beef-tea, and jelly, and sponge cake with her tea, and for a day or two this was all very well. She *was* petted, and she had lots of beef-tea, and jelly, and grapes, and sponge cakes, and everything nice, for her aunts, as you must have seen by this time, were really very, very kind to her in every way in which they understood how to be so.

But after a few days of the continued petting, and the beef-tea and the jelly and all the rest of it, it occurred to Miss Grizzel, who had a good large bump of “common sense,” that it might be possible to overdo this sort of thing.

“Tabitha,” she said to her sister, when they were sitting together in the evening after Griselda had gone to bed, “Tabitha, my dear, I think the child is quite well again now. It seems to me it would be well to send a note to good Mr. Knibreeches, to say that she will be able to resume her studies the day after to-morrow.”

"The day after to-morrow," repeated Miss Tabitha. "The day after to-morrow—to say that she will be able to resume her studies the day after to-morrow—oh yes, certainly. It would be very well to send a note to good Mr. Kneebreeches, my dear Grizzel."

"I thought you would agree with me," said Miss Grizzel, with a sigh of relief (as if poor Miss Tabitha during all the last half-century had ever ventured to do anything else), getting up to fetch her writing materials as she spoke. "It is such a satisfaction to consult together about what we do. I was only a little afraid of being hard upon the child, but as you agree with me, I have no longer any misgiving."

"Any misgiving, oh dear, no!" said Miss Tabitha. "You have no reason for any misgiving, I am sure, my dear Grizzel."

So the note was written and despatched, and the next morning when, about twelve o'clock, Griselda made her appearance in the little drawing-room where her aunts usually sat, looking, it must be confessed, very plump and rosy for an invalid, Miss Grizzel broached the subject.

"I have written to request Mr. Kneebreeches to resume his instructions to-morrow," she said quietly. "I think you are quite well again now, so Dorcas must wake you at your usual hour."

Griselda had been settling herself comfortably on a corner of the sofa. She had got a nice book to read, which her father, hearing of her illness, had sent her by post, and she was looking forward to the tempting plateful of jelly which Dorcas had brought her for luncheon every day since she had been ill. Altogether, she was feeling very "lazy-easy" and contented. Her aunt's announcement felt like a sudden downpour of cold water, or rush of east wind. She sat straight up on her sofa, and exclaimed in a tone of great annoyance—

"Oh, Aunt Grizzel!"

"Well, my dear?" said Miss Grizzel, placidly.

"I wish you wouldn't make me begin lessons again just yet."

I *know* they'll make my head ache again, and Mr. Kneebreeches will be *so* cross. I know he will, and he is so horrid when he is cross."

"Hush!" said Miss Grizzel, holding up her hand in a way that reminded Griselda of the cuckoo's favourite "obeying orders." Just then, too, in the distance the ante-room clock struck twelve. "Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" on it went. Griselda could have stamped with irritation, but *somehow*, in spite of herself, she felt compelled to say nothing. She muttered some not very pretty words, coiled herself round on the sofa, opened her book, and began to read.

But it was not as interesting as she had expected. She had not read many pages before she began to yawn, and she was delighted to be interrupted by Dorcas and the jelly.

But the jelly was not as nice as she had expected, either. She tasted it, and thought it was too sweet; and when she tasted it again, it seemed too strong of cinnamon; and the third taste seemed too strong of everything. She laid down her spoon, and looked about her discontentedly.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said Miss Grizzel. "Is the jelly not to your liking?"

"I don't know," said Griselda shortly. She ate a few spoonfuls, and then took up her book again. Miss Grizzel said nothing more, but to herself she thought that Mr. Kneebreeches had not been recalled any too soon.

All day long it was much the same. Nothing seemed to come right to Griselda. It was a dull, cold day, what is called "a black frost"; not a bright, clear, *pretty*, cold day, but the sort of frost that really makes the world seem dead—makes it almost impossible to believe that there will ever be warmth and sound and "growing-ness" again.

Late in the afternoon Griselda crept up to the ante-room, and sat down by the window. Outside it was nearly dark, and inside it was not much more cheerful—for the fire was nearly out,

and no lamps were lighted; only the cuckoo clock went on tick-ticking briskly as usual.

"I hate winter," said Griselda, pressing her cold little face against the colder window-pane, "I hate winter, and I hate lessons. I would give up being a *person* in a minute if I might be a—a—what would I best like to be? Oh yes, I know—a butterfly. Butterflies never see winter, and they *certainly* never have any lessons or any kind of work to do. I hate *must-ing* to do anything."

"Cuckoo," rang out suddenly above her head.

It was only four o'clock striking, and as soon as he had told it the cuckoo was back behind his doors again in an instant, just as usual. There was nothing for Griselda to feel offended at, but somehow she got quite angry.

"I don't care what you think, cuckoo!" she exclaimed defiantly. "I know you came out on purpose just now, but I don't care. I *do* hate winter, and I *do* hate lessons, and I *do* think it would be nicer to be a butterfly than a little girl."

In her secret heart I fancy she was half in hopes that the cuckoo would come out again, and talk things over with her. Even if he were to scold her, she felt that it would be better than sitting there alone with nobody to speak to, which was very dull work indeed. At the bottom of her conscience there lurked the knowledge that what she *should* be doing was to be looking over her last lessons with Mr. Knee breeches, and refreshing her memory for the next day; but, alas! knowing one's duty is by no means the same thing as doing it, and Griselda sat on by the window doing nothing but grumble and work herself up into a belief that she was one of the most-to-be-pitied little girls in all the world. So that by the time Dorcas came to call her to tea, I doubt if she had a single pleasant thought or feeling left in her heart.

Things grew no better after tea, and before long Griselda asked if she might go to bed. She was "so tired," she said; and

she certainly looked so, for ill-humour and idleness are excellent "tirers," and will soon take the roses out of a child's cheeks, and the brightness out of her eyes. She held up her face to be kissed by her aunts in a meekly reproachful way, which made the old ladies feel quite uncomfortable.

"I am by no means sure that I have done right in recalling Mr. Kneebreeches so soon, Sister Tabitha," remarked Miss Grizzel, uneasily, when Griselda had left the room. But Miss Tabitha was busy counting her stitches, and did not give full attention to Miss Grizzel's observation, so she just repeated placidly, "Oh yes, Sister Grizzel, you may be sure you have done right in recalling Mr. Kneebreeches."

"I am glad you think so," said Miss Tabitha, with again a little sigh of relief. "I was only distressed to see the child looking so white and tired."

Upstairs Griselda was hurry-scurrying into bed. There was a lovely fire in her room—fancy that! Was she not a poor neglected little creature? But even this did not please her. She was too cross to be pleased with anything; too cross to wash her face and hands, or let Dorcas brush her hair out nicely as usual; too cross, alas, to say her prayers! She just huddled into bed, huddling up her mind in an untidy hurry and confusion, just as she left her clothes in an untidy heap on the floor. She would not look into herself, was the truth of it; she shrank from doing so because she *knew* things had been going on in that silly little heart of hers in a most unsatisfactory way all day, and she wanted to go to sleep and forget all about it.

She did go to sleep, very quickly too. No doubt she really was tired; tired with crossness and doing nothing, and she slept very soundly. When she woke up she felt so refreshed and rested that she fancied it must be morning. It was dark, of course, but that was to be expected in mid-winter, especially as the shutters were closed.

"I wonder," thought Griselda, "I wonder if it really *is* morn-

ing. I should like to get up early—I went so early to bed. I think I'll just jump out of bed and open a chink of the shutters. I'll see at once if it's nearly morning, by the look of the sky."

She was up in a minute, feeling her way across the room to the window, and without much difficulty she found the hook of the shutters, unfastened it, and threw one side open. Ah no, there was no sign of morning to be seen. There was moonlight, but nothing else, and not so very much of that, for the clouds were hurrying across the "orbed maiden's" face at such a rate, one after the other, that the light was more like a number of pale flashes than the steady, cold shining of most frosty moonlight nights. There was going to be a change of weather, and the cloud armies were collecting together from all quarters; that was the real explanation of the hurrying and scurrying Griselda saw overhead, but this, of course, she did not understand. She only saw that it looked wild and stormy, and she shivered a little, partly with cold, partly with a half-frightened feeling that she could not have explained.

"I had better go back to bed," she said to herself; "but I am not a bit sleepy."

She was just drawing-to the shutter again, when something caught her eye, and she stopped short in surprise. A little bird was outside on the window-sill—a tiny bird crouching in close to the cold glass. Griselda's kind heart was touched in an instant. Cold as she was, she pushed back the shutter again, and drawing a chair forward to the window, managed to unfasten it—it was a very heavy one—and to open it wide enough to slip her hand gently along to the bird. It did not start or move.

"Can it be dead?" thought Griselda anxiously.

But no, it was not dead. It let her put her hand round it and draw it in, and to her delight she felt that it was soft and warm, and it even gave a gentle peck on her thumb.

"Poor little bird, how cold you must be," she said kindly. But, to her amazement, no sooner was the bird safely inside the

room, than it managed cleverly to escape from her hand. It fluttered quietly up on to her shoulder, and sang out in a soft but cheery tone, "Cuckoo, cuckoo—cold, did you say, Griselda? Not so very, thank you."

Griselda stept back from the window.

"It's *you*, is it?" she said rather surlily, her tone seeming to infer that she had taken a great deal of trouble for nothing.

"Of course it is, and why shouldn't it be? You're not generally so sorry to see me. What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter," replied Griselda, feeling a little ashamed of her want of civility; "only you see, if I had known it was *you*—" She hesitated.

"You wouldn't have clambered up and hurt your poor fingers in opening the window if you had known it was me—is that it, eh?" said the cuckoo.

Somehow, when the cuckoo said "eh?" like that, Griselda was obliged to tell just what she was thinking.

"No, I wouldn't have *needed* to open the window," she said. "You can get in or out whenever you like; you're not like a real bird. Of course, you were just tricking me, sitting out there and pretending to be a starved robin."

There was a little indignation in her voice, and she gave her head a toss, which nearly upset the cuckoo.

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed the cuckoo. "You have a great deal to complain of, Griselda. Your time and strength must be very valuable for you to regret so much having wasted a little of them on me."

Griselda felt her face grow red. What did he mean? Did he know how yesterday had been spent? She said nothing, but she drooped her head, and one or two tears came slowly creeping up to her eyes.

"Child!" said the cuckoo, suddenly changing his tone, "you are very foolish. Is a kind thought or action *ever* wasted? Can your eyes see what such good seeds grow into? They have wings,

Griselda—kindnesses have wings and roots, remember that—wings that never droop, and roots that never die. What do you think I came and sat outside your window for?"

"Cuckoo," said Griselda humbly, "I am very sorry."

"Very well," said the cuckoo, "we'll leave it for the present. I have something else to see about. Are you cold, Griselda?"

"Very," she replied. "I would very much like to go back to bed, cuckoo, if you please; and there's plenty of room for you too, if you'd like to come in and get warm."

"There are other ways of getting warm besides going to bed," said the cuckoo. "A nice brisk walk, for instance. I was going to ask you to come out into the garden with me."

Griselda almost screamed.

"Out into the garden! *Oh, cuckoo!*" she exclaimed, "how can you think of such a thing? Such a freezing cold night. Oh no, indeed, cuckoo, I couldn't possibly."

"Very well, Griselda," said the cuckoo; "if you haven't yet learnt to trust me, there's no more to be said. Good-night."

He flapped his wings, cried out "Cuckoo" once only, flew across the room, and almost before Griselda understood what he was doing, had disappeared.

She hurried after him, stumbling against the furniture in her haste, and by the uncertain light. The door was not open, but the cuckoo had got through it—"by the keyhole, I dare say," thought Griselda; "he can 'scrooge' himself up any way"—for a faint "cuckoo" was to be heard on its other side. In a moment Griselda had opened it, and was speeding down the long passage in the dark, guided only by the voice from time to time heard before her, "cuckoo, cuckoo."

She forgot all about the cold, or rather, she did not feel it, though the floor was of uncarpeted old oak, whose hard, polished surface would have usually felt like ice to a child's soft, bare feet. It was a very long passage, and to-night, somehow, it seemed longer than ever. In fact, Griselda could have fancied she had

been running along it for half a mile or more, when at last she was brought to a standstill by finding she could go no further. Where was she? She could not imagine! It must be a part of the house she had never explored in the daytime, she decided. In front of her was a little stair running downwards, and ending in a doorway. All this Griselda could see by a bright light that streamed in by the keyhole and through the chinks round the door —a light so brilliant that the little girl blinked her eyes, and for a moment felt quite dazzled and confused.

“It came so suddenly,” she said to herself; “some one must have lighted a lamp in there all at once. But it can’t be a lamp, it’s too bright for a lamp. It’s more like the sun; but how ever could the sun be shining in a room in the middle of the night? What shall I do? Shall I open the door and peep in?”

“Cuckoo, cuckoo,” came the answer, soft but clear, from the other side.

“Can it be a trick of the cuckoo’s to get me out into the garden?” thought Griselda; and for the first time since she had run out of her room a shiver of cold made her teeth chatter and her skin feel creepy.

“Cuckoo, cuckoo,” sounded again, nearer this time, it seemed to Griselda.

“He’s waiting for me. I *will* trust him,” she said resolutely. “He has always been good and kind, and it’s horrid of me to think he’s going to trick me.”

She ran down the little stair, she seized the handle of the door. It turned easily; the door opened—opened, and closed again noiselessly behind her, and what do you think she saw?

“Shut your eyes for a minute, Griselda,” said the cuckoo’s voice beside her; “the light will dazzle you at first. Shut them, and I will brush them with a little daisy dew, to strengthen them.”

Griselda did as she was told. She felt the tip of the cuckoo’s softest feather pass gently two or three times over her eyelids, and a delicious scent seemed immediately to float before her.

"I didn't know *daisies* had any scent," she remarked.

"Perhaps you didn't. You forget, Griselda, that you have a great—"

"Oh, please don't, cuckoo. Please, please don't, *dear* cuckoo," she exclaimed, dancing about with her hands clasped in entreaty, but her eyes still firmly closed. "Don't say that, and I'll promise to believe whatever you tell me. And how soon may I open my eyes, please, cuckoo?"

"Turn round slowly, three times. That will give the dew time to take effect," said the cuckoo. "Here goes—one—two—three. There, now."

Griselda opened her eyes.

CHAPTER VII

BUTTERFLY-LAND

"I'd be a butterfly."

GRISELDA opened her eyes.

What did she see?

The loveliest, loveliest garden that ever or never a little girl's eyes saw. As for describing it, I cannot. I must leave a good deal to your fancy. It was just a *delicious* garden. There was a charming mixture of all that is needed to make a garden perfect—grass, velvety lawn rather; water, for a little brook ran tinkling in and out, playing bo-peep among the bushes; trees, of course, and flowers, of course, flowers of every shade and shape. But all these beautiful things Griselda did not at first give as much attention to as they deserved; her eyes were so occupied with a quite unusual sight that met them.

This was butterflies! Not that butterflies are so very uncommon; but butterflies, as Griselda saw them, I am quite sure, children, none of you ever saw, or are likely to see. There were

such enormous numbers of them, and the variety of their colours and sizes was so great. They were fluttering about everywhere; the garden seemed actually alive with them.

Griselda stood for a moment in silent delight, feasting her eyes on the lovely things before her, enjoying the delicious sunshine which kissed her poor little bare feet, and seemed to wrap her all up in its warm embrace. Then she turned to her little friend.

“Cuckoo,” she said, “I thank you *so* much. This *is* fairyland, at last!”

The cuckoo smiled, I was going to say, but that would be a figure of speech only, would it not? He shook his head gently.

“No, Griselda,” he said kindly; “this is only butterfly-land.”

“Butterfly-land!” repeated Griselda, with a little disappointment in her tone.

“Well,” said the cuckoo, “it’s where you were wishing to be yesterday, isn’t it?”

Griselda did not particularly like these allusions to “yesterday.” She thought it would be as well to change the subject.

“It’s a beautiful place, whatever it is,” she said, “and I’m sure, cuckoo, I’m *very* much obliged to you for bringing me here. Now may I run about and look at everything? How delicious it is to feel the warm sunshine again! I didn’t know how cold I was. Look, cuckoo, my toes and fingers are quite blue; they’re only just beginning to come right again. I suppose the sun always shines here. How nice it must be to be a butterfly; don’t you think so, cuckoo? Nothing to do but fly about.”

She stopped at last, quite out of breath.

“Griselda,” said the cuckoo, “if you want me to answer your questions, you must ask them one at a time. You may run about and look at everything if you like, but you had better not be in such a hurry. You will make a great many mistakes if you are—you have made some already.”

“How?” said Griselda.

“*Have* the butterflies nothing to do but fly about? Watch them.”

Griselda watched.

“They do seem to be doing something,” she said, at last, “but I can’t think what. They seem to be nibbling at the flowers, and then flying away something like bees gathering honey. *Butterflies* don’t gather honey, cuckoo?”

“No,” said the cuckoo. “They are filling their paint-boxes.”

“What *do* you mean?” said Griselda.

“Come and see,” said the cuckoo.

He flew quietly along in front of her, leading the way through the prettiest paths in all the pretty garden. The paths were arranged in different colours, as it were; that is to say, the flowers growing along their sides were not all “mixty-maxty,” but one shade after another in regular order—from the palest blush pink to the very deepest damask crimson; then, again, from the soft greenish blue of the small grass forget-me-not to the rich warm tinge of the brilliant cornflower. *Every* tint was there; shades, to which, though not exactly strange to her, Griselda could yet have given no name, for the daisy dew, you see, had sharpened her eyes to observe delicate variations of colour, as she had never done before.

“How beautifully the flowers are planned,” she said to the cuckoo. “Is it just to look pretty, or why?”

“It saves time,” replied the cuckoo. “The fetch-and-carry butterflies know exactly where to go to for the tint the world-flower-painters want.”

“Who are the fetch-and-carry butterflies, and who are the world-flower-painters?” asked Griselda.

“Wait a bit and you’ll see, and use your eyes,” answered the cuckoo. “It’ll do your tongue no harm to have a rest now and then.”

Griselda thought it as well to take his advice, though not particularly relishing the manner in which it was given. She

did use her eyes, and as she and the cuckoo made their way along the flower alleys, she saw that the butterflies were never idle. They came regularly, in little parties of two and threes, and nibbled away, as she called it, at flowers of the same colour but different shades, till they had got what they wanted. Then off flew butterfly No. 1 with perhaps the palest tint of maize, or yellow, or lavender, whichever he was in quest of, followed by No. 2 with the next deeper shade of the same, and No. 3 bringing up the rear.

Griselda gave a little sigh.

“What’s the matter?” said the cuckoo.

“They work very hard,” she replied, in a melancholy tone.

“It’s a busy time of year,” observed the cuckoo, drily.

After a while they came to what seemed to be a sort of centre to the garden. It was a huge glass house, with numberless doors, in and out of which butterflies were incessantly flying—reminding Griselda again of bees and a beehive. But she made no remark till the cuckoo spoke again.

“Come in,” he said.

Griselda had to stoop a good deal, but she did manage to get in without knocking her head or doing any damage. Inside was just a mass of butterflies. A confused mass it seemed at first, but after a while she saw that it was the very reverse of confused. The butterflies were all settled in rows on long, narrow, white tables, and before each was a tiny object about the size of a flattened-out pin’s head, which he was most carefully painting with one of his tentacles, which, from time to time, he moistened by rubbing it on the head of a butterfly waiting patiently behind him. Behind this butterfly again stood another, who after a while took his place, while the first attendant flew away.

“To fill his paint-box again,” remarked the cuckoo, who seemed to read Griselda’s thoughts.

“But what *are* they painting, cuckoo?” she inquired eagerly.

"All the flowers in the world," replied the cuckoo. "Autumn, winter, and spring, they're hard at work. It's only just for the three months of summer that the butterflies have any holiday, and then a few stray ones now and then wander up to the world, and people talk about 'idle butterflies!' And even then it isn't true that they are idle. They go up to take a look at the flowers, to see how their work has turned out, and many a damaged petal they repair, or touch up a faded tint, though no one ever knows it."

"I know it now," said Griselda. "I will never talk about idle butterflies again—never. But, cuckoo, do they paint all the flowers *here*, too? What a *fearful* lot they must have to do!"

"No," said the cuckoo; "the flowers down here are fairy flowers. They never fade or die, they are always just as you see them. But the colours of your flowers are all taken from them, as you have seen. Of course they don't look the same up there," he went on, with a slight contemptuous shrug of his cuckoo shoulders; "the coarse air and the ugly things about must take the bloom off. The wild flowers do the best, to my thinking; people don't meddle with them in their stupid, clumsy way."

"But how do they get the flowers sent up to the world, cuckoo?" asked Griselda.

"They're packed up, of course, and taken up at night when all of you are asleep," said the cuckoo. "They're painted on elastic stuff, you see, which fits itself as the plant grows. Why, if your eyes were as they are usually, Griselda, you couldn't even *see* the petals the butterflies are painting now."

"And the packing up," said Griselda; "do the butterflies do that too?"

"No," said the cuckoo, "the fairies look after that."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Griselda. But before the cuckoo had time to say more a sudden tumult filled the air. It was butterfly dinner-time!

"Are you hungry, Griselda?" said the cuckoo.

“Not so very,” replied Griselda.

“It’s just as well perhaps that you’re not,” he remarked, “for I don’t know that you’d be much the better for dinner here.”

“Why not?” inquired Griselda curiously. “What do they have for dinner? Honey? I like that very well, spread on the top of bread-and-butter, of course—I don’t think I should care to eat it alone.”

“You won’t get any honey,” the cuckoo was beginning; but he was interrupted. Two handsome butterflies flew into the great glass hall, and making straight for the cuckoo, alighted on his shoulders. They fluttered about him for a minute or two, evidently rather excited about something, then flew away again, as suddenly as they had appeared.

“Those were royal messengers,” said the cuckoo, turning to Griselda. “They have come with a message from the king and queen to invite us to a banquet which is to be held in honour of your visit.”

“What fun!” cried Griselda. “Do let’s go at once, cuckoo. But, oh dear me,” she went on, with a melancholy change of tone, “I was forgetting, cuckoo. I can’t go to the banquet. I have nothing on but my night-gown. I never thought of it before, for I’m not a bit cold.”

“Never mind,” said the cuckoo, “I’ll soon have that put to rights.”

He flew off, and was back almost immediately, followed by a whole flock of butterflies. They were of a smaller kind than Griselda had hitherto seen, and they were of two colours only; half were blue, half yellow. They flew up to Griselda, who felt for a moment as if she were really going to be suffocated by them, but only for a moment. There seemed a great buzz and flutter about her, and then the butterflies set to work to *dress* her. And how do you think they dressed her? With *themselves*! They arranged themselves all over her in the cleverest way. One set of blue ones clustered round the hem of her little white night-

gown, making a thick "*ruche*," as it were; and then there came two or three thinner rows of yellow, and then blue again. Round her waist they made the loveliest belt of mingled blue and yellow, and all over the upper part of her night-gown, in and out among the pretty white frills which Dorcas herself "*goffered*" so nicely, they made themselves into fantastic trimmings of every shape and kind; bows, rosettes—I cannot tell you what they did not imitate.

Perhaps the prettiest ornament of all was the coronet or wreath they made of themselves for her head, dotting over her curly brown hair too with butterfly spangles, which quivered like dew-drops as she moved about. No one would have known Griselda; she looked like a fairy queen, or princess, at least, for even her little white feet had what looked like butterfly shoes upon them, though these, you will understand, were only a sort of make-believe, as, of course, the shoes were soleless.

"Now," said the cuckoo, when at last all was quiet again, and every blue and every yellow butterfly seemed settled in his place, "now, Griselda, come and look at yourself."

He led the way to a marble basin, into which fell the waters of one of the tinkling brooks that were to be found everywhere about the garden, and bade Griselda look into the water mirror. It danced about rather; but still she was quite able to see herself. She peered in with great satisfaction, turning herself round, so as to see first over one shoulder, then over the other.

"It *is* lovely," she said at last. "But, cuckoo, I'm just thinking—how shall I possibly be able to sit down without crushing ever so many?"

"Bless you, you needn't trouble about that," said the cuckoo; "The butterflies are quite able to take care of themselves. You don't suppose you are the first little girl they have ever made a dress for?"

Griselda said no more, but followed the cuckoo, walking rather "*gingerly*," notwithstanding his assurances that the butterflies could take care of themselves. At last the cuckoo stopped,

in front of a sort of banked-up terrace, in the centre of which grew a strange-looking plant with large smooth, spreading-out leaves, and on the two topmost leaves, their splendid wings glittering in the sunshine, sat two magnificent butterflies. They were many times larger than any Griselda had yet seen; in fact, the cuckoo himself looked rather small beside them, and they were *so* beautiful that Griselda felt quite over-awed. You could not have said what colour they were, for at the faintest movement they seemed to change into new colours, each more exquisite than the last. Perhaps I could best give you an idea of them by saying that they were like living rainbows.

"Are those the king and queen?" asked Griselda in a whisper.

"Yes," said the cuckoo. "Do you admire them?"

"I should rather think I did," said Griselda. "But, cuckoo, do they never do anything but lie there in the sunshine?"

"Oh, you silly girl," exclaimed the cuckoo, "always jumping at conclusions. No, indeed, that is not how they manage things in butterfly-land. The king and queen have worked harder than any other butterflies. They are chosen every now and then, out of all the others, as being the most industrious and the cleverest of all the world-flower-painters, and then they are allowed to rest, and are fed on the finest essences, so that they grow as splendid as you see. But even now they are not idle; they superintend all the work that is done, and choose all the new colours."

"Dear me!" said Griselda, under her breath, "how clever they must be."

Just then the butterfly king and queen stretched out their magnificent wings, and rose upwards, soaring proudly into the air.

"Are they going away?" said Griselda in a disappointed tone.

"Oh no," said the cuckoo; "they are welcoming you. Hold out your hands."

Griselda held out her hands, and stood gazing up into the

sky. In a minute or two the royal butterflies appeared again, slowly, majestically circling downwards, till at length they alighted on Griselda's little hands, the king on the right, the queen on the left, almost covering her fingers with their great dazzling wings.

"You *do* look nice now," said the cuckoo, hopping back a few steps and looking up at Griselda approvingly; "but it's time for the feast to begin, as it won't do for us to be late."

The king and queen appeared to understand. They floated away from Griselda's hands and settled themselves, this time, at one end of a beautiful little grass plot or lawn, just below the terrace where grew the large-leaved plant. This was evidently their dining-room, for no sooner were they in their place than butterflies of every kind and colour came pouring in, in masses, from all directions. Butterflies small and butterflies large; butterflies light and butterflies dark; butterflies blue, pink, crimson, green, gold-colour—*every* colour, and far, far more colours than you could possibly imagine.

They all settled down, round the sides of the grassy dining-table, and in another minute a number of small white butterflies appeared, carrying among them flower petals carefully rolled up, each containing a drop of liquid. One of these was presented to the king, and then one to the queen, who each sniffed at their petal for an instant, and then passed it on to the butterfly next them, whereupon fresh petals were handed to them, which they again passed on.

"What are they doing, cuckoo?" said Griselda; "that's not *eating*."

"It's their kind of eating," he replied. "They don't require any other kind of food than a sniff of perfume; and as there are perfumes extracted from every flower in butterfly-land, and there are far more flowers than you could count between now and Christmas, you must allow there is plenty of variety of dishes."

"Um-m," said Griselda; "I suppose there is. But all the

same, cuckoo, it's a very good thing I'm not hungry, isn't it? May I pour the scent on my pocket-handkerchief when it comes round to me? I have my handkerchief here, you see. Isn't it nice that I brought it? It was under my pillow, and I wrapped it round my hand to open the shutter, for the hook scratched it once."

"You may pour one drop on your handkerchief," said the cuckoo, "but not more. I shouldn't like the butterflies to think you greedy."

But Griselda grew very tired of the scent feast long before all the petals had been passed round. The perfumes were very nice, certainly, but there were such quantities of them—double quantities in honour of the guest, of course! Griselda screwed up her handkerchief into a tight little ball, so that the one drop of scent should not escape from it, and then she kept sniffing at it impatiently, till at last the cuckoo asked her what was the matter.

"I am so tired of the feast," she said. "Do let us do something else, cuckoo."

"It is getting rather late," said the cuckoo. "But see, Griselda, they are going to have an air-dance now."

"What's that?" said Griselda.

"Look, and you'll see," he replied.

Flocks and flocks of butterflies were rising a short way into the air, and there arranging themselves in bands according to their colours.

"Come up on the bank," said the cuckoo to Griselda; "you'll see them better."

Griselda climbed up the bank, and as from there she could look down on the butterfly show, she saw it beautifully. The long strings of butterflies twisted in and out of each other in a most wonderful way, like ribbons of every hue plaiting themselves and then in an instant unplaiting themselves again. Then the king and queen placed themselves in the centre, and round and

round in moving circles twisted and untwisted the brilliant bands of butterflies.

"It's like a kaleidoscope," said Griselda; "and now it's like those twisty-twirly dissolving views that papa took me to see once. It's *just* like them. Oh, how pretty! Cuckoo, are they doing it all on purpose to please me?"

"A good deal," said the cuckoo. "Stand up and clap your hands loud three times, to show them you're pleased."

Griselda obeyed. "Clap" number one—all the butterflies rose up into the air in a cloud; clap number two—they all fluttered and twirled and buzzed about, as if in the greatest excitement; clap number three—they all turned in Griselda's direction with a rush.

"They're going to kiss you, Griselda," cried the cuckoo.

Griselda felt her breath going. Up above her was the vast feathery cloud of butterflies, fluttering, *rushing* down upon her.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," she screamed, "they'll suffocate me. Oh, cuckoo!"

"Shut your eyes, and clap your hands loud, very loud," called out the cuckoo.

And just as Griselda clapped her hands, holding her precious handkerchief between her teeth, she heard him give his usual cry, "Cuckoo, cuckoo."

Clap—where were they all?

Griselda opened her eyes—garden, butterflies, cuckoo, all had disappeared. She was in bed, and Dorcas was knocking at the door with the hot water.

"Miss Grizzel said I was to wake you at your usual time this morning, missie," she said. "I hope you don't feel too tired to get up."

"Tired! I should think not," replied Griselda. "I was awake this morning ages before you, I can tell you, my dear Dorcas. Come here for a minute, Dorcas, please," she went on.



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"Round and round in moving circles, twisted and untwisted, the brilliant bands
of butterflies."

"There now, sniff my handkerchief. What do you think of that?"

"It's beautiful," said Dorcas. "It's out of the big blue chinay bottle on your auntie's table, isn't it, missie?"

"Suff and nonsense," replied Griselda; "it's scent of my own, Dorcas. Aunt Grizzel never had any like it in her life. There now! Please give me my slippers, I want to get up and look over my lessons for Mr. Kneebreeches before he comes. Dear me," she added to herself, as she was putting on her slippers, "how pretty my feet did look with the blue butterfly shoes! It was very good of the cuckoo to take me there, but I don't think I shall ever wish to be a butterfly again, now I know how hard they work! But I'd like to do my lessons well to-day. I fancy it'll please the dear old cuckoo."

CHAPTER VIII

MASTER PHIL

"Who comes from the world of flowers?
Daisy and crocus, and sea-blue bell,
And violet shrinking in dewy cell—
Sly cells that know the secrets of night,
When earth is bathed in fairy light—
Scarlet, and blue, and golden flowers."

AND so Mr. Kneebreeches had no reason to complain of his pupil that day.

And Miss Grizzel congratulated herself more heartily than ever on her wise management of children.

And Miss Tabitha repeated that Sister Grizzel might indeed congratulate herself.

And Griselda became gradually more and more convinced that the only way as yet discovered of getting through hard tasks is to set to work and do them; also, that grumbling, as things are at present arranged in this world, does not *always*, nor I may

say *often*, do good; furthermore, that an ill-tempered child is not, on the whole, likely to be as much loved as a good-tempered one; lastly, that if you wait long enough, winter will go and spring will come.

For this was the case this year after all! Spring had only been sleepy and lazy, and in such a case what could poor old winter do but fill the vacant post till she came? Why he should be so scolded and reviled for faithfully doing his best, as he often is, I really don't know. Not that all the ill words he gets have much effect on him—he comes again just as usual, whatever we say of, or to, him. I suppose his feelings have long ago been frozen up, or surely before this he would have taken offence—well for us that he has not done so!

But when the spring did come at last this year, it would be impossible for me to tell you how Griselda enjoyed it. It was like new life to her as well as to the plants, and flowers, and birds, and insects. Hitherto, you see, she had been able to see very little of the outside of her aunt's house; and charming as the inside was, the outside, I must say, was still "charminger." There seemed no end to the little up-and-down paths and alleys, leading to rustic seats and quaint arbours; no limits to the little pine-wood, down into which led the dearest little zig-zaggy path you ever saw, all bordered with snow-drops and primroses and violets, and later on with periwinkles, and wood anemones, and those bright, starry, white flowers, whose name no two people agree about.

This wood-path was the place, I think, which Griselda loved the best. The bowling-green was certainly very delightful, and so was the terrace where the famous roses grew; but lovely as the roses were (I am speaking just now, of course, of later on in the summer, when they were all in bloom), Griselda could not enjoy them as much as the wild-flowers, for she was forbidden to gather or touch them, except with her funny round nose!

"You may *scent* them, my dear," said Miss Grizzel, who was

of opinion that smell was not a pretty word; "but I cannot allow anything more."

And Griselda did "scent" them, I assure you. She burrowed her whole rosy face in the big ones; but gently, for she did not want to spoil them, both for her aunt's sake, and because, too, she had a greater regard for flowers now that she knew the secret of how they were painted, and what a great deal of trouble the butterflies take about them.

But after a while one grows tired of "scenting" roses; and even the trying to walk straight across the bowling-green with her eyes shut, from the arbour at one side to the arbour exactly like it at the other, grew stupid, though no doubt it would have been capital fun with a companion to applaud or criticise.

So the wood-path became Griselda's favourite haunt. As the summer grew on, she began to long more than ever for a companion—not so much for play, as for some one to play with. She had lessons, of course, just as many as in the winter; but with the long days, there seemed to come a quite unaccountable increase of play-time, and Griselda sometimes found it hang heavy on her hands. She had not seen or heard anything of the cuckoo either, save, of course, in his "official capacity" of time-teller, for a very long time.

"I suppose," she thought, "he thinks I don't need amusing, now that the fine days are come and I can play in the garden; and certainly, if I had *any one* to play with, the garden would be perfectly lovely."

But, failing companions, she did the best she could for herself, and this was why she loved the path down into the wood so much. There was a sort of mystery about it; it might have been the path leading to the cottage of Red-Ridinghood's grandmother, or a path leading to fairyland itself. There were all kinds of queer, nice, funny noises to be heard there—in one part of it especially, where Griselda made herself a seat of some moss-grown stones, and where she came so often that she got to know

all the little flowers growing close round about, and even the particular birds whose nests were hard by.

She used to sit there and *fancy*—fancy that she heard the wood-elves chattering under their breath, or the little underground gnomes and kobolds hammering at their fairy forges. And the tinkling of the brook in the distance sounded like the enchanted bells round the necks of the fairy kine, who are sent out to pasture sometimes on the upper world hillsides. For Griselda's head was crammed full, perfectly full, of fairy lore; and the mandarins' country, and butterfly-land, were quite as real to her as the every-day world about her.

But all this time she was not forgotten by the cuckoo, as you will see.

One day she was sitting in her favourite nest, feeling, notwithstanding the sunshine, and the flowers, and the soft sweet air, and the pleasant sounds all about, rather dull and lonely. For though it was only May, it was really quite a hot day, and Griselda had been all the morning at her lessons, and had tried very hard, and done them very well, and now she felt as if she deserved some reward. Suddenly in the distance, she heard a well-known sound, “Cuckoo, cuckoo.”

“Can that be the cuckoo?” she said to herself; and in a moment she felt sure that it must be. For, for some reason that I do not know enough about the habits of real “flesh and blood” cuckoos to explain, that bird was not known in the neighbourhood where Griselda's aunts lived. Some twenty miles or so further south it was heard regularly, but all this spring Griselda had never caught the sound of its familiar note, and she now remembered hearing it never came to these parts.

So, “it must be my cuckoo,” she said to herself. “He must be coming out to speak to me. How funny! I have never seen him by daylight.”

She listened. Yes, again there it was, “Cuckoo, cuckoo,” as plain as possible, and nearer than before.

“Cuckoo,” cried Griselda, “do come and talk to me. It’s such a long time since I have seen you, and I have nobody to play with.”

But there was no answer. Griselda held her breath to listen, but there was nothing to be heard.

“Unkind cuckoo!” she exclaimed. “He is tricking me, I do believe; and to-day too, just when I was so dull and lonely.”

The tears came into her eyes, and she was beginning to think herself very badly used, when suddenly a rustling in the bushes beside her made her turn round, more than half expecting to see the cuckoo himself. But it was not he. The rustling went on for a minute or two without anything making its appearance, for the bushes were pretty thick just there, and any one scrambling up from the pinewood below would have had rather hard work to get through, and indeed for a very big person such a feat would have been altogether impossible.

It was not a very big person, however, who was causing all the rustling and crunching of branches, and general commotion, which now absorbed Griselda’s attention. She sat watching for another minute in perfect stillness, afraid of startling by the slightest movement the squirrel or rabbit or creature of some kind which she expected to see. At last—was that a squirrel or a rabbit—that rosy, round face, with shaggy, fair hair falling over the eager blue eyes, and a general look of breathlessness and over-heatedness and determination?

A squirrel or a rabbit! No, indeed, but a very sturdy, very merry, very ragged little boy.

“Where are that cuckoo? Does *you* know?” were the first words he uttered, as soon as he had fairly shaken himself, though not by any means all his clothes, free of the bushes (for ever so many pieces of jacket and knickerbockers, not to speak of one boot and half his hat, had been left behind on the way), and found breath to say something.

Griselda stared at him for a moment without speaking. She

was so astonished. It was months since she had spoken to a child, almost since she had seen one, and about children younger than herself she knew very little at any time, being the baby of the family at home, you see, and having only big brothers older than herself for play-fellows.

"Who are you?" she said at last. "What's your name, and what do you want?"

"My name's Master Phil, and I want that cuckoo," answered the little boy. "He camed up this way. I'm sure he did, for he called me all the way."

"He's not here," said Griselda, shaking her head; "and this is my aunts' garden. No one is allowed to come here but friends of theirs. You had better go home; and you have torn your clothes so."

"This aren't a garden," replied the little fellow undauntedly, looking round him; "this are a wood. There are blue-bells and primroses here, and that shows it aren't a garden—not anybody's garden, I mean, with walls round, for nobody to come in."

"But it *is*," said Griselda, getting rather vexed. If it isn't a garden it's *grounds*, private grounds, and nobody should come without leave. This path leads down to the wood, and there's a door in the wall at the bottom to get into the lane. You may go down that way, little boy. No one comes scrambling up the way you did."

"But I want to find the cuckoo," said the little boy. "I do so want to find the cuckoo."

His voice sounded almost as if he were going to cry, and his pretty, hot, flushed face puckered up. Griselda's heart smote her; she looked at him more carefully. He was such a very little boy, after all; she did not like to be cross to him.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Five and a bit. I had a birthday after the summer, and if I'm good, nurse says perhaps I'll have one after next summer too. Do you ever have birthdays?" he went on, peering up at

Griselda. "Nurse says she used to when she was young, but she never has any now."

"Have you a nurse?" asked Griselda, rather surprised; for to tell the truth, from "Master Phil's" appearance, she had not felt at all sure what *sort* of little boy he was, or rather what sort of people he belonged to.

"Of course I have a nurse, and a mother too," said the little boy, opening wide his eyes in surprise at the question. "Haven't you? Perhaps you're too big, though. People leave off having nurses and mothers when they're big, don't they? Just like birthdays. But I won't. I won't never leave off having a mother, any way. I don't care so much about nurse and birthdays, not *kite* so much. Did you care when you had to leave off, when you got too big?"

"I hadn't to leave off because I got big," said Griselda sadly. "I left off when I was much littler than you," she went on, unconsciously speaking as Phil would best understand her. "My mother died."

"I'm werry sorry," said Phil; and the way in which he said it quite overcame Griselda's unfriendliness. "But perhaps you have a nice nurse. My nurse is rather nice; but she *will* 'cold me to-day won't she?" he added, laughing, pointing to the terrible rents in his garments. "These are my very oldestest things; that's a good thing, isn't it? Nurse says I don't look like Master Phil in these, but when I have on my blue welpet, then I look like Master Phil. I shall have my blue welpet when mother comes."

"Is your mother away?" said Griselda.

"Oh, yes, she's been away a long time; so nurse came here to take care of me at the farm-house, you know. Mother was ill, but she's better now, and some day she'll come too."

"Do you like being at the farm-house? Have you anybody to play with?" said Griselda.

Phil shook his curly head. "I never have anybody to play

with," he said. "I'd like to play with you if you're not too big. And do you think you could help me find the cuckoo?" he added insinuatingly.

"What do you know about the cuckoo?" said Griselda.

"He called me," said Phil, "he called me lots of times; and to-day nurse was busy, so I thought I'd come. And do you know," he added mysteriously, "I do believe the cuckoo's a fairy, and when I find him I'm going to ask him to show me the way to fairyland."

"He says we must all find the way ourselves," said Griselda, quite forgetting to whom she was speaking.

"Does he?" cried Phil, in great excitement. "Do you know him, then—and have you asked him? Oh, do tell me."

Griselda recollected herself. "You couldn't understand," she said. "Some day perhaps I'll tell you—I mean if I ever see you again."

"But I may see you again," said Phil, settling himself down comfortably beside Griselda on her mossy stone. "You'll let me come, won't you? I like to talk about fairies, and nurse doesn't understand. And if the cuckoo knows you, perhaps that's why he called me to come to play with you."

"How did he call you?" asked Griselda.

"First," said Phil gravely, "it was in the night. I was asleep, and I had been wishing I had somebody to play with, and then I d'reamed of the cuckoo—such a nice d'eam. And when I woke up I heard him calling me, and I wasn't d'reaming then. And then when I was in the field he called me, but I *couldn't* find him, and nurse said 'Nonsense.' And to-day he called me again, so I came up through the bushes. And mayn't I come again? Perhaps if we both tried together we could find the way to fairyland. Do you think we could?"

"I don't know," said Griselda, dreamily. "There's a great deal to learn first, the cuckoo says."

"Have you learnt a great deal?" (he called it "a gate deal")

asked Phil, looking up at Griselda with increased respect. “*I* don’t know scarcely nothing. Mother was ill such a long time before she went away, but *I* know she wanted me to learn to read books. But nurse is too old to teach me.”

“Shall *I* teach you?” said Griselda. “I can bring some of my old books and teach you here after *I* have done my own lessons.”

“And then mother *would* be surprised when she comes back,” said Master Phil, clapping his hands. “Oh, *do*. And when *I*’ve learnt to read a great deal, do you think the cuckoo would show us the way to fairyland?”

“I don’t think it was that sort of learning *he* meant,” said Griselda. “But *I* dare say that would help. *I think*,” she went on, lowering her voice a little, and looking down gravely into Phil’s earnest eyes, “*I think* he means mostly learning to be very good—very, *very* good, you know.”

“Gooder than you?” said Phil.

“Oh, dear, yes; lots and lots gooder than me,” replied Griselda.

“*I* think you’re very good,” observed Phil, in a parenthesis. Then he went on with his cross-questioning.

“Gooder than mother?”

“I don’t know your mother, so how can *I* tell how good she is?” said Griselda.

“*I* can tell you,” said Phil, importantly. “She is just as good as—as good as—as good as *good*. That’s what she is.”

“You mean she couldn’t be better,” said Griselda, smiling.

“Yes, that’ll do, if you like. Would that be good enough for us to be, do you think?”

“We must ask the cuckoo,” said Griselda. “But *I*’m sure it would be a good thing for you to learn to read. You must ask your nurse to let you come here every afternoon that it’s fine, and *I*’ll ask my aunt.”

“I needn’t ask nurse,” said Phil composedly; “she’ll never

know where I am, and I needn't tell her. She doesn't care what I do, except tearing my clothes; and when she scolds me, *I* don't care."

"*That* isn't good, Phil," said Griselda gravely. "You'll never be as good as good if you speak like that."

"What should I say, then? Tell me," said the little boy submissively.

"You should ask nurse to let you come to play with me, and tell her I'm much bigger than you, and I won't let you tear your clothes. And you should tell her you're very sorry you've torn them to-day."

"Very well," said Phil, "I'll say that. But, oh see!" he exclaimed, darting off, "there's a field mouse! If only I could catch him!"

Of course he couldn't catch him, nor could Griselda either; very ready, though, she was to do her best. But it was great fun all the same, and the children laughed heartily and enjoyed themselves tremendously. And when they were tired they sat down again and gathered flowers for nosegays, and Griselda was surprised to find how clever Phil was about it. He was much quicker than she at spying out the prettiest blossoms, however hidden behind tree, or stone, or shrub. And he told her of all the best places for flowers near by, and where grew the largest primroses and the sweetest violets, in a way that astonished her.

"You're such a little boy," she said; "how do you know so much about flowers?"

"I've had no one else to play with," he said innocently. "And then, you know, the fairies are so fond of them."

When Griselda thought it was time to go home, she led little Phil down the wood-path, and through the door in the wall opening on to the lane.

"Now you can find your way home without scrambling through any more bushes, can't you, Master Phil?" she said.

"Yes, thank you, and I'll come again to that place to-morrow

afternoon, shall I?" asked Phil. "I'll know when—after I've had my dinner and raced three times round the big field, then it'll be time. That's how it was to-day."

"I should think it would do if you *walked* three times—or twice if you like—round the field. It isn't a good thing to race just when you've had your dinner," observed Griselda sagely. "And you mustn't try to come if it isn't fine, for my aunts won't let me go out if it rains even the tiniest bit. And of course you must ask your nurse's leave."

"Very well," said little Phil as he trotted off. "I'll try to remember all those things. I'm so glad you'll play with me again; and if you see the cuckoo, please thank him."

CHAPTER IX

UP AND DOWN THE CHIMNEY

"Helper. Well, but if it was all dream, it would be the same as if it was all real, would it not?

"Keeper. Yes, I see. I mean, Sir, I do not see."—*A Lilliput Revel.*

Not having "just had her dinner," and feeling very much inclined for her tea, Griselda ran home at a great rate.

She felt, too, in such good spirits; it had been so delightful to have a companion in her play.

"What a good thing it was I didn't make Phil run away before I found out what a nice little boy he was," she said to herself. "I must look out my old reading books to-night. I shall so like teaching him, poor little boy, and the cuckoo will be pleased at my doing something useful, I'm sure."

Tea was quite ready, in fact waiting for her, when she came in. This was a meal she always had by herself, brought up on a tray to Dorcas's little sitting-room, where Dorcas waited upon her. And sometimes when Griselda was in a particularly good

humour she would beg Dorcas to sit down and have a cup of tea with her—a liberty the old servant was far too dignified and respectful to have thought of taking, unless specially requested to do so.

This evening, as you know, Griselda was in a very particularly good humour, and besides this, so very full of her adventures, that she would have been glad of an even less sympathising listener than Dorcas was likely to be.

“Sit down, Dorcas, and have some more tea, do,” she said coaxingly. “It looks ever so much more comfortable, and I’m sure you could eat a little more if you tried, whether you’ve had your tea in the kitchen or not. I’m *fearfully* hungry, I can tell you. You’ll have to cut a whole lot more bread and butter, and not ‘ladies’ slices’ either.”

“How your tongue does go, to be sure, Miss Griselda,” said Dorcas, smiling, as she seated herself on the chair Griselda had drawn in for her. . .

“And why shouldn’t it?” said Griselda saucily. “It doesn’t do it any harm. But oh, Dorcas, I’ve had such fun this afternoon—really, you couldn’t guess what I’ve been doing.”

“Very likely not, missie,” said Dorcas.

“But you might try to guess. Oh no, I don’t think you need—guessing takes such a time, and I want to tell you. Just fancy, Dorcas, I’ve been playing with a little boy in the wood.”

“Playing with a little boy, Miss Griselda!” exclaimed Dorcas, aghast.

“Yes, and he’s coming again to-morrow, and the day after, and every day, I dare say,” said Griselda. “He *is* such a nice little boy.”

“But, missie,” began Dorcas.

“Well? What’s the matter? You needn’t look like that—as if I had done something naughty,” said Griselda sharply.

“But you’ll tell your aunt, missie?”

“Of course,” said Griselda, looking up fearlessly into Dor-

cas's face with her bright gray eyes. "Of course; why shouldn't I? I must ask her to give the little boy leave to come into *our* grounds; and I told the little boy to be sure to tell his nurse, who takes care of him, about his playing with me."

"His nurse," repeated Dorcas, in a tone of some relief. "Then he must be quite a little boy, perhaps Miss Grizzel would not object so much in that case."

"Why should she object at all? She might know I wouldn't want to play with a naughty rude boy," said Griselda.

"She thinks all boys rude and naughty, I'm afraid, missie," said Dorcas. "All, that is to say, excepting your dear papa. But then, of course, she had the bringing up of *him* in her own way from the beginning."

"Well, I'll ask her, anyway," said Griselda, "and if she says I'm not to play with him, I shall think—I know what I shall *think* of Aunt Grizzel, whether I *say* it or not."

And the old look of rebellion and discontent settled down again on her rosy face.

"Be careful, Missie, now do, there's a dear good girl," said Dorcas anxiously, an hour later, when Griselda, dressed as usual in her little white muslin frock, was ready to join her aunts at dessert.

But Griselda would not condescend to make any reply.

"Aunt Grizzel," she said suddenly, when she had eaten an orange and three biscuits and drunk half a glass of home-made elder-berry wine, "Aunt Grizzel, when I was out in the garden to-day—down the wood-path, I mean—I met a little boy, and he played with me, and I want to know if he may come every day to play with me."

Griselda knew she was not making her request in a very amiable or becoming manner; she knew, indeed, that she was making it in such a way as was almost certain to lead to its being refused; and yet, though she was really so very, very anxious

to get leave to play with little Phil, she took a sort of spiteful pleasure in injuring her own cause.

How *foolish* ill-temper makes us! Griselda had allowed herself to get so angry at the thought of being thwarted that had her aunt looked up quietly and said at once, "Oh yes, you may have the little boy to play with you whenever you like," she would really, in a strange distorted sort of way, have been *disappointed*.

But, of course, Miss Grizzel made no such reply. Nothing less than a miracle could have made her answer Griselda otherwise than as she did. Like Dorcas, for an instant, she was utterly "flabbergasted," if you know what that means. For she was really quite an old lady, you know, and sensible as she was, things upset her much more easily than when she was younger.

Naughty Griselda saw her uneasiness, and enjoyed it.

"Playing with a boy!" exclaimed Miss Grizzel. "A boy in my grounds, and you, my niece, to have played with him!"

"Yes," said Griselda coolly, "and I want to play with him again."

"Griselda," said her aunt, "I am too astonished to say more at present. Go to bed."

"Why should I go to bed? It is not my bedtime," cried Griselda, blazing up. "What have I done to be sent to bed as if I were in disgrace?"

"Go to bed," repeated Miss Grizzel. "I will speak to you to-morrow."

"You are very unfair and unjust," said Griselda, starting up from her chair. "That's all the good of being honest and telling everything. I might have played with the little boy every day for a month and you would never have known, if I hadn't told you."

She banged across the room as she spoke, and out at the door, slamming it behind her rudely. Then upstairs like a whirlwind; but when she got to her own room, she sat down on the

floor and burst into tears, and when Dorcas came up, nearly half an hour later, she was still in the same place, crouched up in a little heap, sobbing bitterly.

“Oh, missie, missie,” said Dorcas, “it’s just what I was afraid of!”

As Griselda rushed out of the room Miss Grizzel leant back in her chair and sighed deeply.

“Already,” she said faintly. “She was never so violent before. Can one afternoon’s companionship with rudeness have already contaminated her? Already, Tabitha—can it be so?”

“Already,” said Miss Tabitha, softly shaking her head, which somehow made her look wonderfully like an old cat, for she felt cold of an evening and usually wore a very fine woolly shawl of a delicate gray shade, and the borders of her cap and the ruffles round her throat and wrists were all of fluffy, downy white—“already,” she said.

“Yet,” said Miss Grizzel, recovering herself a little, “it is true what the child said. She might have deceived us. Have I been hard upon her, Sister Tabitha?”

“Hard upon her Sister Grizzel!” said Miss Tabitha with more energy than usual; “no, certainly not. For once, Sister Grizzel, I disagree with you. Hard upon her! Certainly not.”

But Miss Grizzel did not feel happy.

When she went up to her own room at night she was surprised to find Dorcas waiting for her, instead of the younger maid.

“I thought you would not mind having me, instead of Martha, to-night, ma’am,” she said, “for I did so want to speak to you about Miss Griselda. The poor, dear young lady has gone to bed so very unhappy.”

“But do you know what she has done, Dorcas?” said Miss Grizzel. “Admitted a *boy*, a rude, common, impertinent *boy*, into my precincts, and played with him—with a *boy*, Dorcas.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Dorcas. “I know all about it, ma’am. Miss Griselda has told me all. But if you would allow me to

give an opinion, it isn't quite so bad. He's quite a little boy, ma'am—between five and six—only just about the age Miss Griselda's dear papa was when he first came to us, and, by all I can hear, quite a little gentleman."

"A little gentleman," repeated Miss Grizzel, "and not six years old! That is less objectionable than I expected. What is his name, as you know so much, Dorcas?"

"Master Phil," replied Dorcas. "That is what he told Miss Griselda, and she never thought to ask him more. But I'll tell you how we could get to hear more about him, I think, ma'am. From what Miss Griselda says, I believe he is staying at Mr. Crouch's farm, and that, you know, ma'am, belongs to my Lady Lavander, though it a good way from Merrybrow Hall. My lady is pretty sure to know about the child, for she knows all that goes on among her tenants, and I remember hearing that a little gentleman and his nurse had come to Mr. Crouch's to lodge for six months."

Miss Grizzel listened attentively.

"Thank you, Dorcas," she said, when the old servant had left off speaking. "You have behaved with your usual discretion. I shall drive over to Merrybrow to-morrow, and make inquiry. And you may tell Miss Griselda in the morning what I purpose doing; but tell her also that, as a punishment for her rudeness and ill-temper, she must have breakfast in her own room to-morrow, and not see me till I send for her. Had she restrained her temper and explained the matter, all this distress might have been saved."

Dorcas did not wait till "to-morrow morning"; she could not bear to think of Griselda's unhappiness. From her mistress's room she went straight to the little girl's, going in very softly, so as not to disturb her should she be sleeping.

"Are you awake, missie?" she said gently.

Griselda started up.

"Yes," she exclaimed. "Is it you, cuckoo? I'm quite awake."

“Bless the child,” said Dorcas to herself, “how her head does run on Miss Sybilla’s cuckoo. It’s really wonderful. There’s more in such things than some people think.”

But aloud she only replied—

“It’s Dorcas, missie. No fairy, only old Dorcas come to comfort you a bit. Listen, missie. Your auntie is going over to Merrybrow Hall to-morrow to inquire about this little Master Phil from my Lady Lavander, for we think it’s at one of her ladyship’s farms that he and his nurse are staying, and if she hears that he’s a nice-mannered little gentleman, and comes of good parents—why, missie, there’s no saying but that you’ll get leave to play with him as much as you like.”

“But not to-morrow, Dorcas,” said Griselda. “Aunt Grizzel never goes to Merrybrow till the afternoon. She won’t be back in time for me to play with Phil to-morrow.”

“No, but next day, perhaps,” said Dorcas.

“Oh, but that won’t do,” said Griselda, beginning to cry again. “Poor little Phil will be coming up to the wood-path *to-morrow*, and if he doesn’t find me, he’ll be *so* unhappy—perhaps he’ll never come again if I don’t meet him to-morrow.”

Dorcas saw that the little girl was worn out and excited, and not inclined to take a reasonable view of things.

“Go to sleep, missie,” she said kindly, “and don’t think anything more about it till to-morrow. It’ll be all right, you’ll see.”

Her patience touched Griselda.

“You are very kind, Dorcas,” she said. “I don’t mean to be cross to *you*; but I can’t bear to think of poor little Phil. Perhaps he’ll sit down on my mossy stone and cry. Poor little Phil!”

But notwithstanding her distress, when Dorcas had left her she did feel her heart a little lighter, and somehow or other before long she fell asleep.

When she awoke it seemed to be suddenly, and she had the feeling that something had disturbed her. She lay for a minute or two perfectly still—listening. Yes; there it was—the soft,

faint rustle in the air that she knew so well. It seemed as if something was moving away from her.

“Cuckoo,” she said gently, “is that you?”

A moment’s pause, then came the answer—the pretty greeting she expected.

“Cuckoo, cuckoo,” soft and musical. Then the cuckoo spoke.

“Well, Griselda,” he said, “and how are you? It’s a good while since we have had any fun together.”

“That’s not *my* fault,” said Griselda sharply. She was not yet feeling quite as amiable as might have been desired, you see. “That’s *certainly* not my fault,” she repeated.

“I never said it was,” replied the cuckoo. “Why will you jump at conclusions so? It’s a very bad habit, for very often you jump *over* them, you see, and go too far. One should always *walk* up to conclusions, very slowly and evenly, right foot first, then left, one with another—that’s the way to get where you want to go, and feel sure of your ground. Do you see?”

“I don’t know whether I do or not, and I’m not going to speak to you if you go on at me like that. You might see I don’t want to be lectured when I am so unhappy.”

“What are you unhappy about?”

“About Phil, of course. I won’t tell you, for I believe you know,” said Griselda. “Wasn’t it you that sent him to play with me? I was so pleased, and I thought it was very kind of you; but it’s all spoilt now.”

“But I heard Dorcas saying that your aunt is going over to consult my Lady Lavander about it,” said the cuckoo. “It’ll be all right; you needn’t be in such low spirits about nothing.”

“Were you in the room *then?*” said Griselda. “How funny you are, cuckoo. But it isn’t all right. Don’t you see, poor little Phil will be coming up the wood-path to-morrow afternoon to meet me, and I won’t be there! I can’t bear to think of it.”

“Is that all?” said the cuckoo. “It really is extraordinary

how some people make troubles out of nothing! We can easily tell Phil not to come till the day after. Come along."

"Come along," repeated Griselda; "what do you mean?"

"Oh, I forgot," said the cuckoo. "You don't understand. Put out your hand. There, do you feel me?"

"Yes," said Griselda, stroking gently the soft feathers which seemed to be close under her hand. "Yes, I feel you."

"Well, then," said the cuckoo, "put your arms round my neck, and hold me firm. I'll lift you up."

"How can you talk such nonsense, cuckoo?" said Griselda. "Why, one of my little fingers would clasp your neck. How can I put my arms round it?"

"Try," said the cuckoo.

Somehow Griselda had to try.

She held out her arms in the cuckoo's direction, as if she expected his neck to be about the size of a Shetland pony's, or a large Newfoundland dog's; and, to her astonishment, so it was! A nice, comfortable, feathery neck it felt—so soft that she could not help laying her head down upon it, and nestling in the downy cushion.

"That's right," said the cuckoo.

Then he seemed to give a little spring, and Griselda felt herself altogether lifted on to his back. She lay there as comfortably as possible—it felt so firm as well as soft. Up he flew a little way—then stopped short.

"Are you all right?" he inquired. "You're not afraid of falling off?"

"Oh no," said Griselda; "not a bit."

"You needn't be," said the cuckoo, "for you couldn't if you tried. I'm going on, then."

"Where to?" said Griselda.

"Up the chimney first," said the cuckoo.

"But there'll never be room," said Griselda. "I might *perhaps* crawl up like a sweep, hands and knees, you know, like

going up a ladder. But stretched out like this—it's just as if I were lying on a sofa—I *couldn't* go up the chimney."

"Couldn't you?" said the cuckoo. "We'll see. *I* intend to go, anyway, and to take you with me. Shut your eyes—one, two, three—here goes—we'll be up the chimney before you know."

It was quite true. Griselda shut her eyes tight. She felt nothing but a pleasant sort of rush. Then she heard the cuckoo's voice saying—

"Well, wasn't that well done? Open your eyes and look about you."

Griselda did so. Where were they?

They were floating about above the top of the house, which Griselda saw down below them, looking dark and vast. She felt confused and bewildered.

"Cuckoo," she said, "I don't understand. Is it I that have grown little, or you that have grown big?"

"Whichever you please," said the cuckoo. "You have forgotten. I told you long ago it is all a matter of fancy."

"Yes, if everything grew little together," persisted Griselda; "but it isn't everything. It's just you or me, or both of us. No, it can't be both of us. And I don't think it can be me, for if any of me had grown little all would, and my eyes haven't grown little, for everything looks as big as usual, only *you* a great deal bigger. My eyes can't have grown bigger without the rest of me, surely, for the moon looks just the same. And I must have grown little, or else we couldn't have get up the chimney. Oh, cuckoo, you have put all my thinking into such a muddle!"

"Never mind," said the cuckoo. "It'll show you how little consequence big and little are of. Make yourself comfortable all the same. Are you all right? Shut your eyes if you like. I'm going pretty fast."

"Where to?" said Griselda.

"To Phil, of course," said the cuckoo. "What a bad memory you have! Are you comfortable?"

"*Very*, thank you," replied Griselda, giving the cuckoo's neck an affectionate hug as she spoke.

"That'll do, thank you. Don't throttle me, if it's quite the same to you," said the cuckoo. "Here goes—one, two, three," and off he flew again.

Griselda shut her eyes and lay still. It was delicious—the gliding, yet darting motion, like nothing she had ever felt before. It did not make her the least giddy, either; but a slightly sleepy feeling came over her. She felt no inclination to open her eyes; and, indeed, at the rate they were going, she could have distinguished very little had she done so.

Suddenly the feeling in the air about her changed. For an instant it felt more *rushy* than before, and there was a queer, dull sound in her ears. Then she felt that the cuckoo had stopped.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"We've just come *down* a chimney again," said the cuckoo. "Open your eyes and clamber down off my back; but don't speak loud, or you'll waken him, and that wouldn't do. There you are—the moonlight's coming in nicely at the window—you can see your way."

Griselda found herself in a little bedroom, quite a tiny one, and by the look of the simple furniture and the latticed window, she saw that she was not in a grand house. But everything looked very neat and nice, and on a little bed in one corner lay a lovely sleeping child. It was Phil! He looked so pretty asleep—his shaggy curls all tumbling about, his rosy mouth half open as if smiling, one little hand tossed over his head, the other tight clasping a little basket which he had insisted on taking to bed with him, meaning as soon as he was dressed the next morning to run out and fill it with flowers for the little girl he had made friends with.

Griselda stepped up to the side of the bed on tiptoe. The cuckoo had disappeared, but Griselda heard his voice. It seemed to come from a little way up the chimney.

"Don't wake him," said the cuckoo, "but whisper what you want to say into his ear, as soon as I have called him. He'll understand; he's accustomed to my ways."

Then came the old note, soft and musical as ever—

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo. Listen, Phil," said the cuckoo, and without opening his eyes a change passed over the little boy's face. Griselda could see that he was listening to hear her message.

"He thinks he's dreaming, I suppose," she said to herself with a smile. Then she whispered softly—

"Phil, dear, don't come to play with me to-morrow, for I can't come. But come the day after. I'll be at the wood-path then."

"Welly well," murmured Phil. Then he put out his two arms toward Griselda, all without opening his eyes, and she, bending down, kissed him softly.

"Phil's so sleepy," he whispered, like a baby almost. Then he turned over and went to sleep more soundly than before.

"That'll do," said the cuckoo. "Come along, Griselda."

Griselda obediently made her way to the place whence the cuckoo's voice seemed to come.

"Shut your eyes and put your arms round my neck again," said the cuckoo.

She did not hesitate this time. It all happened just as before. There came the same sort of rushy sound; then the cuckoo stopped, and Griselda opened her eyes.

They were up in the air again—a good way up, too, for some grand old elms that stood beside the farmhouse were gently waving their topmost branches a yard or two from where the cuckoo was poising himself and Griselda.

"Where shall we go to now?" he said. "Or would you rather go home? Are you tired?"

"Tired!" exclaimed Griselda: I should rather think not. How could I be tired, cuckoo?"

"Very well, don't excite yourself about nothing, whatever you do," said the cuckoo. "Say where you'd like to go."

"How can I?" said Griselda. "You know far more nice places than I do."

"You don't care to go back to the mandarins, or the butterflies, I suppose?" asked the cuckoo.

"No, thank you," said Griselda; "I'd like something new. And I'm not sure that I care for seeing any more countries of that kind, unless you could take me to the *real* fairyland."

"I can't do that, you know," said the cuckoo.

Just then a faint "soughing" sound among the branches suggested another idea to Griselda.

"Cuckoo," she exclaimed, "take me to the sea. It's *such* a time since I saw the sea. I can fancy I hear it; do take me to see it."

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

"That after supper time has come,
And silver dews in the meadows steep,
And all is silent in the home,
And even nurses are asleep,

That be it late, or be it soon,
Upon this lovely night in June
They both will step into the moon."

"Very well," said the cuckoo. "You would like to look about you a little on the way, perhaps, Griselda, as we shall not be going down chimneys, or anything of that kind just at present."

"Yes," said Griselda. "I think I should. I'm rather tired of shutting my eyes, and I'm getting quite accustomed to flying about with you, cuckoo."

"Turn on your side, then," said the cuckoo, "and you won't have to twist your neck to see over my shoulder. Are you comfortable now? And, by-the-by, as you may be cold, just feel

under my left wing. You'll find the feather mantle there, that you had on once before. Wrap it round you. I tucked it in at the last moment, thinking you might want it."

"Oh, you dear, kind cuckoo!" cried Griselda. "Yes, I've found it. I'll tuck it all round me like a rug—that's it. I *am* so warm now, cuckoo."

"Here goes, then," said the cuckoo, and off they set. Had ever a little girl such a flight before? Floating, darting, gliding, sailing—no words can describe it. Griselda lay still in delight, gazing all about her.

"How lovely the stars are, cuckoo!" she said. "Is it true they're all great, big *suns*? I'd rather they weren't. I like to think of them as nice, funny little things."

"They're not all *suns*," said the cuckoo. "Not all those you're looking at now."

"I like the twinkling ones best," said Griselda. "They look so good-natured. Are they *all* twirling about always, cuckoo? Mr. Kneebreeches has just begun to teach me astronomy, and *he* says they are; but I'm not at all sure that he knows much about it."

"He's quite right all the same," replied the cuckoo.

"Oh, dear me! How tired they must be, then!" said Griselda. "Do they never rest just for a minute?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

"Obeying orders," replied the cuckoo.

Griselda gave a little wriggle.

"What's the use of it?" she said. "It would be just as nice if they stood still now and then."

"Would it?" said the cuckoo. "I know somebody who would soon find fault if they did. What would you say to no summer; no day, or no night, whichever it happened not to be, you see; nothing growing, and nothing to eat before long? That's what it would be if they stood still, you see, because——"

"Thank you, cuckoo," interrupted Griselda. "It's very nice

to hear you—I mean, very dreadful to think of, but I don't want you to explain. I'll ask Mr. Kneebreeches when I'm at my lessons. You might tell me one thing, however. What's at the other side of the moon?"

"There's a variety of opinions," said the cuckoo.

"What are they? Tell me the funniest."

"Some say all the unfinished work of the world is kept there," said the cuckoo.

"That's not funny," said Griselda. "What a messy place it must be! Why, even *my* unfinished work makes quite a heap. I don't like that opinion at all, cuckoo. Tell me another."

"I *have* heard," said the cuckoo, "that among the places there you would find the country of the little black dogs. You know what sort of creatures those are?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Griselda, rather reluctantly.

"There are a good many of them in this world, as of course you know," continued the cuckoo. "But up there, they are much worse than here. When a child has made a great pet of one down here, I've heard tell the fairies take him up there when his parents and nurses think he's sleeping quietly in his bed, and make him work hard all night, with his own particular little black dog on his back. And it's so dreadfully heavy—for every time he takes it on his back down here it grows a pound heavier up there—that by morning the child is quite worn out. I dare say you've noticed how haggard and miserable some ill-tempered children get to look—now you'll know the reason."

"Thank you, cuckoo," said Griselda again; "but I can't say I like this opinion about the other side of the moon any better than the first. If you please, I would rather not talk about it any more."

"Oh, but it's not so bad an idea after all," said the cuckoo. "Lots of children, they say, get quite cured in the country of the little black dogs. It's this way—for every time a child refuses to take the dog on his back down here it grows a pound lighter

up there, so at last any sensible child learns how much better it is to have nothing to say to it at all, and gets out of the way of it, you see. Of course, there *are* children whom nothing would cure, I suppose. What becomes of them I really can't say. Very likely they get crushed into pancakes by the weight of the dogs at last, and then nothing more is ever heard of them."

"Horrid!" said Griselda, with a shudder. "Don't let's talk about it any more, cuckoo; tell me your *own* opinion about what there really is on the other side of the moon."

The cuckoo was silent for a moment. Then suddenly he stopped short in the middle of his flight.

"Would you like to see for yourself, Griselda?" he said. "There would be about time to do it," he added to himself, "and it would fulfill her other wish, too."

"See the moon for myself, do you mean?" cried Griselda, clasping her hands. "I should rather think I would. Will you really take me there, cuckoo?"

"To the other side," said the cuckoo. "I couldn't take you to this side."

"Why not? Not that I'd care to go to this side as much as to the other; for, of course, we can *see* this side from here. But I'd like to know why you couldn't take me there."

"For *reasons*," said the cuckoo drily. "I'll give you one if you like. If I took you to this side of the moon you wouldn't be yourself when you got there."

"Who would I be, then?"

"Griselda," said the cuckoo, "I told you once that there are a great many things you don't know. Now, I'll tell you something more. There are a great many things you're not *intended* to know."

"Very well," said Griselda. "But do tell me when you're going on again, and where you are going to take me to. There's no harm my asking that?"

"No," said the cuckoo, "I'm going on immediately, and I'm

going to take you where you wanted to go to, only you must shut your eyes again, and lie perfectly still without talking, for I must put on steam—a good deal of steam—and I can't talk to you. Are you all right?"

"All right," said Griselda.

She had hardly said the words when she seemed to fall asleep. The rushing sound in the air all round her increased so greatly that she was conscious of nothing else. For a moment or two she tried to remember where she was, and where she was going, but it was useless. She forgot everything, and knew nothing more of what was passing till—till she heard the cuckoo again.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo; wake up, Griselda," he said.

Griselda sat up.

Where was she?

Not certainly where she had been when she went to sleep. Not on the cuckoo's back, for there he was standing beside her, as tiny as usual. Either he had grown little again, or she had grown big—which, she supposed, it did not much matter. Only it was very queer!

"Where am I, cuckoo?" she said.

"Where you wished to be," he replied. "Look about you and see."

Griselda looked about her. What did she see. Something that I can only give you a faint idea of, children; something so strange and unlike what she had ever seen before, that only in a dream could you see it as Griselda saw it. And yet *why* it seemed to her so strange and unnatural I cannot well explain; if I could, my words would be as good as pictures, which I know they are not.

After all, it was only the sea she saw; but such a great, strange, silent sea, for there were no waves. Griselda was seated on the shore, close beside the water's edge, but it did not come lapping up to her feet in the pretty, coaxing way that *our* sea does when it is in a good humour. There were here and there faint

ripples on the surface, caused by the slight breezes which now and then came softly round Griselda's face, but that was all. King Canute might have sat "from then till now" by this still, lifeless ocean without the chance of reading his silly attendants a lesson—if, indeed, there ever were such silly people, which I very much doubt.

Griselda gazed with all her eyes. Then she suddenly gave a little shiver.

"What's the matter?" said the cuckoo. "You have the mantle on—you're not cold?"

"No," said Griselda, "I'm not cold; but somehow, cuckoo, I feel a little frightened. The sea is so strange, and so dreadfully big; and the light is so queer, too. What is the light, cuckoo? It isn't moonlight, is it?"

"Not exactly," said the cuckoo. "You can't both have your cake and eat it, Griselda. Look up at the sky. There's no moon there, is there?"

"No," said Griselda; "but what lots of stars, cuckoo. The light comes from them, I suppose? And where's the sun, cuckoo? Will it be rising soon? It isn't always like this up here, is it?"

"Bless you, no," said the cuckoo. "There's sun enough, and rather too much, sometimes. How would you like a day a fortnight long, and nights to match? If it had been daytime here just now, I couldn't have brought you. It's just about the very middle of the night now, and in about a week of *your* days the sun will begin to rise, because, you see——"

"Oh, *dear* cuckoo, please don't explain!" cried Griselda. I'll promise to ask Mr. Kneebreeches, I will indeed. In fact, he was telling me something just like it to-day or yesterday—which should I say?—at my astronomy lesson. And that makes it so strange that you should have brought me up here to-night to see for myself, doesn't it, cuckoo?"

"An odd coincidence," said the cuckoo.

"What *would* Mr. Kneebreeches think if I told him where

I had been?" continued Griselda. "Only, you see, cuckoo, I never tell anybody about what I see when I am with you."

"No," replied the cuckoo; "better not. ("Not that you could if you tried," he added to himself.) You're not frightened now, Griselda, are you?"

"No, I don't think I am," she replied. "But, cuckoo, isn't this sea *awfully* big?"

"Pretty well," said the cuckoo. "Just half, or nearly half, the size of the moon; and, no doubt, Mr. Kneebreeches has told you that the moon's diameter and circumference are respec——"

"Oh *don't*, cuckoo!" interrupted Griselda, beseechingly. "I want to enjoy myself, and not to have lessons. Tell me something funny, cuckoo. Are there any mermaids in the moon-sea?"

"Not exactly," said the cuckoo.

"What a stupid way to answer," said Griselda. "There's no sense in that; there either must be or must not be. There couldn't be half mermaids."

"I don't know about that," replied the cuckoo. "They might have been here once and have left their tails behind them, like Boopiep's sheep, you know; and some day they might be coming to find them again, you know. That would do for 'not exactly,' wouldn't it?"

"Cuckoo, you're laughing at me," said Griselda. "Tell me, are there any mermaids, or fairies, or water-sprites, or any of those sort of creatures here?"

"I must still say 'not exactly,'" said the cuckoo. "There are beings here, or rather there have been, and there may be again; but you, Griselda, can know no more than this."

His tone was rather solemn, and again Griselda felt a little "eerie."

"It's a dreadfully long way from home, anyway," she said. "I feel as if, when I go back, I shall perhaps find I have been away fifty years or so, like the little boy in the fairy story.

Cuckoo, I think I would like to go home. Mayn't I get on your back again?"

"Presently," said the cuckoo. "Don't be uneasy, Griselda. Perhaps I'll take you home by a short cut."

"Was ever any child here before?" asked Griselda, after a little pause.

"Yes," said the cuckoo.

"And did they get safe home again?"

"Quite," said the cuckoo. "It's so silly of you, Griselda, to have all these ideas still about far and near, and big and little, and long and short, after all I've taught you and all you've seen."

"I'm very sorry," said Griselda humbly; "but you see, cuckoo, I can't help it. I suppose I'm made so."

"Perhaps," said the cuckoo, meditatively.

He was silent for a minute. Then he spoke again. "Look over there, Griselda," he said. "There's the short cut."

Griselda looked. Far, far over the sea, in the silent distance, she saw a tiny speck of light. It was very tiny; but yet the strange thing was that, far away as it appeared, and minute as it was, it seemed to throw off a thread of light to Griselda's very feet—right across the great sheet of faintly gleaming water. And as Griselda looked, the thread seemed to widen and grow, becoming at the same time brighter and clearer, till at last it lay before her like a path of glowing light.

"Am I to walk along there?" she said softly to the cuckoo.

"No," he replied; "wait."

Griselda waited, looking still, and presently in the middle of the shining streak she saw something slowly moving—something from which the light came, for the nearer it got to her the shorter grew the glowing path, and behind the moving object the sea looked no brighter than before it had appeared.

At last—at last, it came quite near—near enough for Griselda to distinguish clearly what it was.

It was a little boat—the prettiest, the loveliest little boat that

ever was seen; and it was rowed by a little figure that at first Griselda felt certain was a fairy. For it was a child with bright hair and silvery wings, which with every movement sparkled and shone like a thousand diamonds.

Griselda sprang up and clapped her hands with delight. At the sound, the child in the boat turned and looked at her. For one instant she could not remember where she had seen him before; then she exclaimed, joyfully—

“It is Phil! Oh, cuckoo, it is Phil. Have you turned into a fairy, Phil?”

But, alas, as she spoke the light faded away, the boy’s figure disappeared, the sea and the shore and the sky were all as they had been before, lighted only by the faint, strange gleaming of the stars. Only the boat remained. Griselda saw it close to her, in the shallow water, a few feet from where she stood.

“Cuckoo,” she exclaimed in a tone of reproach and disappointment, “where is Phil gone? Why did you send him away?”

“I didn’t send him away,” said the cuckoo. “You don’t understand. Never mind, but get into the boat. It’ll be all right, you’ll see.”

“But are we to go away and leave Phil here, all alone at the other side of the moon?” said Griselda, feeling ready to cry.

“Oh, you silly girl!” said the cuckoo. “Phil’s all right, and in some ways he has a great deal more sense than you, I can tell you. Get into the boat and make yourself comfortable; lie down at the bottom and cover yourself up with the mantle. You needn’t be afraid of wetting your feet a little, moon water never gives cold. There, now.”

Griselda did as she was told. She was beginning to feel rather tired, and it certainly was very comfortable at the bottom of the boat, with the nice warm feather-mantle well tucked round her.

“Who will row?” she said sleepily. “*You can’t, cuckoo, with your tiny little claws, you could never hold the oars, I’m—*”

“Hush!” said the cuckoo; and whether he rowed or not Griselda never knew.

Off they glided somehow, but it seemed to Griselda that *somebody* rowed, for she heard the soft dip, dip of the oars as they went along, so regularly that she couldn’t help beginning to count in time—one, two, three, four—on, on—she thought she had got nearly to a hundred, when—

CHAPTER XI

“CUCKOO, CUCKOO, GOOD-BYE!”

“Children, try to be good!
That is the end of all teaching;
Easily understood,
And very easy in preaching.
And if you find it hard,
Your efforts you need but double;
Nothing deserves reward
Unless it has given us trouble.”

WHEN she forgot everything, and fell fast, fast asleep, to wake, of course, in her own little bed as usual!

“One of your tricks again, Mr. Cuckoo,” she said to herself with a smile. “However, I don’t mind. It *was* a short cut home, and it was very comfortable in the boat, and I certainly saw a great deal last night, and I’m very much obliged to you—particularly for making it all right with Phil about not coming to play with me to-day. Ah! that reminds me, I’m in disgrace. I wonder if Aunt Grizzel will really make me stay in my room all day. How tired I shall be, and what will Mr. Kneebreeches think! But it serves me right. I *was* very cross and rude.”

There came a tap at the door. It was Dorcas with the hot water.

“Good morning, missie,” she said gently, not feeling, to tell the truth, **very** sure as to what sort of a humour “missie” was

likely to be found in this morning. "I hope you've slept well."

"Exceedingly well, thank you, Dorcas. I've had a delightful night," replied Griselda amiably, smiling to herself at the thought of what Dorcas would say if she knew where she had been, and what she had been doing since last she saw her.

"That's good news," said Dorcas in a tone of relief; "and I've good news for you, too, missie. At least, I hope you'll think it so. Your aunt has ordered the carriage for quite early this morning—so you see she really wants to please you, missie, about playing with little Master Phil; and if to-morrow's a fine day, we'll be sure to find some way of letting him know to come."

"Thank you, Dorcas. I hope it will be all right, and that Lady Lavander won't say anything against it. I dare say she won't. I feel ever so much happier this morning, Dorcas; and I'm very sorry I was so rude to Aunt Grizzel, for of course I know I *should* obey her."

"That's right, missie," said Dorcas approvingly.

"It seems to me, Dorcas," said Griselda dreamily, when, a few minutes later, she was standing by the window while the old servant brushed out her thick, wavy hair, "it seems to me, Dorcas, that it's *all* 'obeying orders' together. There's the sun now, just getting up, and the moon just going to bed—*they* are always obeying, aren't they? I wonder why it should be so hard for people—for children, at least."

"To be sure, missie, you do put it a way of your own," replied Dorcas, somewhat mystified; "but I see how you mean, I think, and it's quite true. And it *is* a hard lesson to learn."

"I want to learn it *well*, Dorcas," said Griselda, resolutely. "So will you please tell Aunt Grizzel that I'm very sorry about last night, and I'll do just as she likes about staying in my room or anything. But, if she *would* let me, I'd far rather go down and do my lessons as usual for Mr. Kneebreeches. I won't ask to go out in the garden; but I would like to please Aunt Grizzel by doing my lessons *very* well."

Dorcas was both delighted and astonished. Never had she known her little “missie” so altogether submissive and reasonable.

“I only hope the child’s not going to be ill,” she said to herself. But she proved a skilful ambassadress, notwithstanding her misgivings; and Griselda’s imprisonment confined her only to the bounds of the house and terrace walk, instead of within the four walls of her own little room, as she had feared.

Lessons *were* very well done that day, and Mr. Kneebreeches’ report was all that could be wished.

“I am particularly gratified,” he remarked to Miss Grizzel, “by the intelligence and interest Miss Griselda displays with regard to the study of astronomy, which I have recently begun to give her some elementary instruction in. And, indeed, I have no fault to find with the way in which any of the young lady’s tasks are performed.”

“I am extremely glad to hear it,” replied Miss Grizzel graciously, and the kiss with which she answered Griselda’s request for forgiveness was a very hearty one.

And it was “all right” about Phil.

Lady Lavander knew all about him; his father and mother were friends of hers, for whom she had a great regard, and for some time she had been intending to ask the little boy to spend the day at Merrybrow Hall, to be introduced to her goddaughter Griselda. So, *of course*, as Lady Lavander knew all about him, there could be no objection to his playing in Miss Grizzel’s garden!

And “to-morrow” turned out a fine day. So altogether you can imagine that Griselda felt very happy and light-hearted as she ran down the wood-path to meet her little friend, whose rosy face soon appeared among the bushes.

“What did you do yesterday, Phil?” asked Griselda. “Were you sorry not to come to play with me?”

“No,” said Phil mysteriously, “I didn’t mind. I was looking

for the way to fairyland to show you, and I do believe I've found it. Oh, it *is* such a pretty way."

Griselda smiled.

"I'm afraid the way to fairyland isn't so easily found," she said. "But I'd like to hear about where you went. Was it far?"

"A good way," said Phil. "Won't you come with me? It's in the wood. I can show you quite well, and we can be back by tea-time."

"Very well," said Griselda; and off they set.

Whether it was the way to fairyland or not, it was not to be wondered at that little Phil thought so. He led Griselda right across the wood to a part where she had never been before. It was pretty rough work part of the way. The children had to fight with brambles and bushes, and here and there to creep through on hands and knees, and Griselda had to remind Phil several times of her promise to his nurse that his clothes should not be the worse for his playing with her, to prevent his scrambling through "anyhow" and leaving bits of his knickerbockers behind him.

But when at last they reached Phil's favourite spot all their troubles were forgotten. Oh, how pretty it was! It was a sort of tiny glade in the very middle of the wood—a little green nest enclosed all round by trees, and right through it the merry brook came rippling along as if rejoicing at getting out into the sunlight again for a while. And all the choicest and sweetest of the early summer flowers seemed to be collected here in greater variety and profusion than in any other part of the wood.

"*Isn't* it nice?" said Phil, as he nestled down beside Griselda on the soft, mossy grass. "It must have been a fairies' garden some time, I'm sure, and I shouldn't wonder if one of the doors into fairyland is hidden somewhere here, if only we could find it."

"If only!" said Griselda. "I don't think we shall find it, Phil; but, any way, this is a lovely place you've found, and I'd like to come here very often."

Then at Phil's suggestion they set to work to make themselves a house in the centre of this fairies' garden, as he called it. They managed it very much to their own satisfaction, by dragging some logs of wood and big stones from among the brushwood hard by, and filling the holes up with bracken and furze.

"And if the fairies *do* come here," said Phil, "they'll be very pleased to find a house all ready, won't they?"

Then they had to gather flowers to ornament the house inside, and dry leaves and twigs all ready for a fire in one corner. Altogether it was quite a business, I can assure you, and when it was finished they were very hot and very tired and *rather* dirty. Suddenly a thought struck Griselda.

"Phil," she said, "it must be getting late."

"Past tea-time?" he said coolly.

"I dare say it is. Look how low down the sun has got. Come, Phil, we must be quick. Where is the place we came out of the wood at?"

"Here," said Phil, diving at a little opening among the bushes.

Griselda followed him. He had been a good guide hitherto, and she certainly could not have found her way alone. They scrambled on for some way, then the bushes suddenly seemed to grow less thick, and in a minute they came out upon a little path.

"Phil," said Griselda, "this isn't the way we came."

"Isn't it?" said Phil, looking about him. "Then we must have comed the wrong way."

"I'm afraid so," said Griselda, "and it seems to be so late already. I'm so sorry, for Aunt Grizzel will be vexed, and I did so want to please her. Will your nurse be vexed, Phil?"

"I don't care if she are," replied Phil valiantly.

"You shouldn't say that, Phil. You know we *shouldn't* have stayed so long playing."

"Nebber mind," said Phil. "If it was mother I would mind.

Mother's so good, you don't know. And she never 'colds me, except when I *am* naughty—so I *do* mind."

"She wouldn't like you be out so late, I'm sure," said Griselda in distress, "and it's most my fault, for I'm the biggest. Now, which way *shall* we go?"

They had followed the little path till it came to a point where two roads, rough cart-ruts only, met; or, rather, where the path ran across the road. Right, or left, or straight on, which should it be? Griselda stood still in perplexity. Already it was growing dusk; already the moon's soft light was beginning faintly to glimmer through the branches. Griselda looked up to the sky.

"To think," she said to herself—"to think that I should not know my way in a little bit of a wood like this—I that was up at the other side of the moon last night."

The remembrance put another thought into her mind.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo," she said softly, "couldn't you help us?"

Then she stood still and listened, holding Phil's cold little hands in her own.

She was not disappointed. Presently, in the distance, came the well-known cry, "cuckoo, cuckoo," so soft and far away, but yet so clear.

Phil clapped his hands.

"He's calling us," he cried joyfully. "He's going to show us the way. That's how he calls me always. Good cuckoo, we're coming"; and, pulling Griselda along, he darted down the road to the right—the direction from whence came the cry.

They had some way to go, for they had wandered far in a wrong direction, but the cuckoo never failed them. Whenever they were at a loss—whenever the path turned or divided, they heard his clear, sweet call; and, without the least misgiving, they followed it, till at last it brought them out upon the high-road, a stone's throw from Farmer Crouch's gate.

"I know the way now, good cuckoo," exclaimed Phil. "I can go home alone now, if your aunt will be vexed with you."

"No," said Griselda, "I must take you quite all the way home, Phil dear. I promised to take care of you, and if nurse scolds any one it must be me, not you."

There was a little bustle about the door of the farmhouse as the children wearily came up to it. Two or three men were standing together receiving directions from Mr. Crouch himself, and Phil's nurse was talking eagerly. Suddenly she caught sight of the truants.

"Here he is, Mr. Crouch!" she exclaimed. "No need now to send to look for him. Oh, Master Phil, how could you stay out so late? And to-night of all nights, just when your—I forgot, I mustn't say;—come into the parlour at once—and this little girl, who is she?"

"She isn't a little girl, she's a young lady," said Master Phil, putting on his lordly air. "And she's to come into the parlour and have some supper with me, and then some one must take her home to her auntie's house—that's what I say."

More to please Phil than from any wish for "supper," for she was really in a fidget to get home, Griselda let the little boy lead her into the parlour. But she was for a moment perfectly startled by the cry that broke from him when he opened the door and looked into the room. A lady was standing there, gazing out of the window, though in the quickly growing darkness she could hardly have distinguished the little figure she was watching for so anxiously.

The noise of the door opening made her look round.

"Phil," she cried, "my own little Phil; where have you been to? You didn't know I was waiting here for you, did you?"

"Mother, mother!" shouted Phil, darting into his mother's arms.

But Griselda drew back into the shadow of the doorway, and tears filled her eyes as for a minute or two she listened to the cooings and caressings of the mother and son.

Only for a minute, however. Then Phil called to her.

"Mother, mother," he cried again, "you must kiss Griselda, too! She's the little girl that is so kind, and plays with me; and she has no mother," he added in a lower tone.

The lady put her arm round Griselda, and kissed her, too. She did not seem surprised.

"I think I know about Griselda," she said very kindly, looking into her face with her gentle eyes, blue and clear like Phil's.

And then Griselda found courage to say how uneasy she was about the anxiety her aunts would be feeling, and a messenger was sent off at once to tell of her being safe at the farm.

But Griselda herself the kind lady would not let go till she had some nice supper with Phil, and was both warmed and rested.

"And what were you about, children, to lose your way?" she asked presently.

"I took Griselda to see a place that I thought was the way to fairyland, and then we stayed to build a house for the fairies, in case they come, and then we came out at the wrong side, and it got dark," explained Phil.

"And *was* it the way to fairyland?" asked the mother, smiling.

Griselda shook her head as she replied—

"Phil doesn't understand yet," she said gently. "He isn't old enough. The way to the true fairyland is hard to find, and we must each find it for ourselves, mustn't we?"

She looked up in the lady's face as she spoke, and saw that *she* understood.

"Yes, dear child," she answered softly, and perhaps a very little sadly. "But Phil and you may help each other, and I perhaps may help you both."

Griselda slid her hand into the lady's. "You're not going to take Phil away, are you?" she whispered.

"No, I have come to stay here," she answered, "and Phil's father is coming too, soon. We are going to live at the White House—the house on the other side of the wood, on the way to Merrybrow. Are you glad, children?"

Griselda had a curious dream that night—merely a dream, nothing else. She dreamt that the cuckoo came once more; this time, he told her, to say “good-bye.”

“For you will not need me now,” he said. “I leave you in good hands, Griselda. You have friends now who will understand you—friends who will help you both to work and to play. Better friends than the mandarins, or the butterflies, or even than your faithful old cuckoo.”

And when Griselda tried to speak to him, to thank him for his goodness, to beg him still sometimes to come to see her, he gently fluttered away. “Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo,” he warbled; but somehow the last “cuckoo” sounded like “good-bye.”

In the morning, when Griselda awoke, her pillow was wet with tears. Thus many stories end. She was happy, very happy in the thought of her kind new friends; but there were tears for the one she felt she had said farewell to, even though he was only a cuckoo in a clock.

THE SIX POOR LITTLE PRINCESSES

"And all the Christ Child's other gifts . . .

. . . but still—but still—

The doll seem'd all my waking thoughts to fill. . . ."

THE DOLL THAT NE'ER WAS MINE.

THERE were six of them, beginning with Helen and ending with Baby, and as Helen was only twelve and Baby already five, it is easy to understand that they were all pretty near of a size. But they weren't really princesses. That was all Jinny's planning. Indeed most things which were nice or amusing or at all "out-of-the-way" were Jinny's planning.

Jinny's long name was Ginevra. She came third. Helen and Agatha were in front of her, and below her came Elspeth and Belinda and Baby. Baby had a proper name, I suppose, but I never heard it, and so I can't tell you what it was. And as no one ever did hear it, I don't see that it much matters. Nor would it have mattered much if Belinda had had no proper name either, for she was never called anything but Butter-ball. The story was that it was because she was so fat; and as, like many fat people, she was very good-natured, she did not mind.

They were all together in the nursery, together but alone, as was rather often the case; for they had no kind, comfortable old nurse to spoil and scold them by turns, poor children, only a girl that Miss Burton, the lady whom they lived with, kept "to do the nursery work," which does not sound like being a nice nurse at all, though I suppose Miss Burton did not understand the difference. There were a good many things she did not understand. She liked the children to be neatly dressed, and to have good plain food in plenty; she was very particular that they should

do their lessons and go for a walk every day when it was fine enough, but that was about all she thought of. She did not think they needed any fun except what they could make for themselves, and even then it must not be too noisy; she could not understand that they could possibly be "dull," caged up in their nursery. "Dull," when there were six of them to play together? She would have laughed at the idea.

They had few story-books and fewer toys. So they had to invent stories for themselves, and as for the toys, to make believe very much indeed. But how they would have succeeded in either had it not been for Jinny I should be afraid to say.

"It's a shame—a regular shame," said Ginevra. She was sitting on the table in the middle of the room with Elspeth beside her. The two little ones were cross-legged on the floor, very disconsolately nursing the battered remains of two very hideous old dolls, who in their best days could never have been anything but coarse and common, and Helen and Agatha sat together on a chair with a book in their hands, which, however, they were not reading. "It's a shame," Ginevra repeated; "even the little princes in the tower had toys to play with."

"Had they?" said Helen. "Is that in the history, Jinny?"

"It's in some history; anyway, I'm sure I've heard it," Jinny replied.

"But this isn't a tower," said Agatha.

"No, it's a dungeon," replied Ginevra grimly. "And if any of you besides me had the spirit of a true princess, you wouldn't stand it."

"We don't want to stand it any more than you do," Helen said quietly. "But what are we to do? You don't want to run away, do you? Where could we run to? It isn't as if papa was anywhere in England. Besides, we're not starved or beaten, and we're in no danger of having our heads cut off."

"I'd rather we were—there'd be some fun in that," said Princess Jinny.

“Fun!” repeated Agatha.

“Well, it wouldn’t be as stupid as being shut up here in this dreary old nursery—I mean dungeon,” said Ginevra. “And now that our cruel gaoler has refused to let us have the small solace of —of a——” she could not find any more imposing word—“doll to play with, I think the time has come to take matters into our own hands, princesses.”

“I’ve no objection,” said Helen and Agatha, speaking together. “But what do you mean to do?”

“You shouldn’t call Miss Burton a gaoler—she isn’t as bad as *that*; besides, she’s not a man,” said Elspeth, who had not before spoken. “We might call her the governor—no, governess; but that sounds so funny, ‘governess of the tower,’ or custo—then some word like that, of the castle.”

“But this isn’t a tower—we’ve fixed that—nor a castle. It’s just a dungeon—that’ll do very well, and it’s great fun at night when we put out the candles and grope about in the dark. And gaoler will do very well for Miss Burton—some are quite kind, much kinder than she.”

“It’s all along of our never having had any mamma,” said a slow, soft little voice from the floor.

“Princess Butter-ball, what a vulgar way of speaking you have!—‘all along of’—I’m ashamed of you,” said Jinny severely. “Besides, we did have a mamma once—all except——” and she glanced at Baby, but without finishing her sentence. For had she done so poor Princess Baby would have burst into loud sobs; it was a very sore point with her that she had never had a mamma at all, whereas all the others, even Butter-ball, were perfectly sure they could remember their mother.

“If Aunt Ginevra would come home,” sighed Elspeth. “We’ve always been promised she would.”

“And she’s written us kind letters,” added Agatha.

“What’s letters?” said Jinny contemptuously.

“Well, you needn’t complain,” said Helen. “She sent you a

silver mug—real silver—and that's more than any of our godmothers did for the rest of us."

"Yes, she did," said Jinny, "and it's fortunate for us all, princesses, that through all our troubles I have always kept that one—memento of happier days about my person——"

"What stories, Jinny?" Agatha exclaimed. "At least it's stories if you're being real just now. You mix up princess-ing and real, so that I get quite muddled. But, you know, you *don't* carry the mug about with you."

For all answer, Princess Ginevra, after some fumbling in her pocket, drew out a short, thick parcel wrapped in tissue-paper, which she unfolded, and held up to view a silver mug.

"There now," she said.

Agatha looked rather crestfallen.

"It must be very uncomfortable to have that lumpy thing in your pocket, and some day Miss Burton will be asking where it's gone," she said. "I suppose it makes you fancy yourself more a princess, but I'm getting rather tired of fancies. Now if we only had a beautiful doll, and could all work at dressing it, that *would* be worth something."

"And we might go on being princesses all the same, or even more," put in Elspeth.

"Patience," said Jinny, "patience and courage. Leave it to me. I think I see my way. I have my eye on a trusty adherent, and if I am not much mistaken, you shall have a doll before Christmas."

All five pricked up their ears at this—they had all at the bottom of their hearts the greatest faith in Ginevra, though the elder ones now and then felt it necessary to snub her a little.

"Are you in earnest, Jinny?" said Helen; "and if you are, I wish you'd tell us what you mean. Who is the trusty adherent?"

"I know," said Agatha. "It's the red-haired boy next door. Jinny dropped her umbrella the other day and he picked it up for

her, and she stopped to thank him—that day we had colds and couldn't go out, Helen."

"No," said Elspeth; "it was Jinny that picked up some of his books that dropped—he was carrying such a pile of awful messy ragged ones. He must go to a messy school."

"He was not going to school," said Ginevra. "He was taking these old books to—but no, I must not betray him."

"Rubbish," said Agatha; "he can't be more than nine. What could there be to betray? *He's* not a shut-up prince, Jinny. Do talk sense for once."

Ginevra changed her tone.

"I don't want to tell you," she said in a matter-of-fact voice, "for fear of disappointing you all. Just wait a very few days and then I'll tell you. But first, *supposing* we could get a doll, what should it be like—fair or dark?"

"Dark, black hair and brown eyes," replied all the five voices. For the six princesses had fair curls and blue eyes, so, naturally, they preferred a contrast.

"Hum," said Jinny. "Brown hair, perhaps, but not black. The black-haired dolls in the shop-windows look common."

"Never mind. *Any* haired would do so long as we got her," said Agatha. "But don't talk about it. It does make me want her *so* dreadfully."

Late that afternoon, just about the time that the little boy next door would be coming home from school, a small figure with a shawl drawn over its head might have been seen at Miss Burton's front gate. She had waited patiently for some minutes. At last she was rewarded by the sight, or the sound rather, for it was almost too dark to see any one, of Master Red-Head coming up the road. When he got close to his own door she called out. It was rather difficult to do so, for she had no idea what his name was.

"Master—Mr.—" she began, and then changing suddenly, "boy, please, I don't know your name."

He stopped and came up to her, exclaiming of course, "I say who's there? What's up?"

"It's me—Prin—I mean one of the little girls next door, the one who picked up your old books the other day. I want to ask you something, please."

Red-Head was all attention, and the two went on talking for some minutes.

"You're sure he will?" said Jinny at last.

"Quite positive. I'll get all out of him I can. It's real silver, you say."

"Real, pure silver," she replied.

"And—and it's your very own? I mean you may do what you like with it?" Red-Head went on, for he was a boy with a conscience.

"Of course it's my own. Do you think I'd steal?" exclaimed Jinny indignantly, so indignantly that she omitted to answer his second question, not even asking it of herself.

"No, no, of course not. But you know—I wouldn't get leave to sell my watch though it's my own. Only I suppose it's all because you've no father and mother to look after you. It's very hard on you to have no toys. I suppose girls can't live without dolls. But I say, tell me again about the doll. I'll have to do it all at once, for we're going away for the holidays the day after tomorrow."

"You're to get all the money you can, and the very prettiest doll you can have for the money. With brown hair, remember—not light, we're tired of light, we've all got it ourselves—and not black, black's common."

"And not red, I suppose. You may as well say it. I don't mind."

"Well, no," said Ginevra hesitatingly. She would not for worlds have hurt his feelings—no princess would so treat a trusty adherent—yet she could not pretend to a weakness for red hair. "I *think* we'd like brown best."

"All right. Then to-morrow afternoon, just about this time. It's a half-holiday—we're breaking up, but it's best to wait till dark for fear you should get a scolding. I'll be here just about this time, with—you know what."

"Thank you, oh, thank you so much," and Ginevra held out her hand, half expecting him to kiss it, instead of which, however, he gave it a schoolboy shake.

"I can excuse it, however; he could not be expected to understand," she said to herself as she flew up to the nursery.

She could scarcely sleep that night, and the next morning it was all she could do to keep her secret. But there was plenty of determination under Princess Jinny's fair curls, and by dint of much squeezing of her lips together and saying to herself what a pity it would be to spoil the beautiful "surprise," she managed to get through the morning without doing more than dropping some mysterious hints. But how long the day seemed, short as it really was! Would it never get dark? For it was clear and frosty, and the afternoon, to Jinny, appeared, out of contradiction, to be twice as long as usual of closing in.

"All comes, however to him (or her) who waits," and the blissful moment at last arrived when Ginevra found herself running upstairs, though not so fast as the evening before, for fear of dropping the precious parcel she held in her arms.

"The dear, sweet boy," she said to herself. "I'd have liked to kiss him. Perhaps we all might when he comes home again."

For Red-Head's last words had been a charge not to forget to let him know after the holidays if Miss Dolly was approved of.

Ginevra burst into the nursery.

"Princesses," she exclaimed, "shut your eyes, while I unwrap her. I'll shut mine too. I haven't seen her myself."

"Is it—can it be—the doll?" they all cried, and their hearts nearly stopped beating with excitement.

"Now," Jinny exclaimed.

They all pressed forward. All six pairs of eyes were fixed

on Jinny's lap, but not a sound was heard. A blank look of disappointment fell over every face. Red-Head, poor Red-Head had done his best, but oh, what a mistake! He had bought a *dressed* doll, and as ten and sixpence, which was all he had got for the mug, will not go very far in such articles, it can be imagined that Dolly herself, notwithstanding the gorgeousness of her attire, fell short, lamentably short of the poor princesses' expectations.

"She's only china, and her hair's a put-on wig," said Agatha, with tears in her eyes.

"Her clothes don't even take off and on, and they're not a bit like a little girl's clothes," said Elspeth.

Ginevra said not a word; her face told of nothing less than despair.

"And poor darling Jinny has sold her mug to buy it with—all to please us. I found it out, but it was too late to stop it," said Helen. "Jinny darling, we must like her, we *will*—anyway she'll be better than nothing. We'll make her new clothes, and then perhaps she won't look so vulgar," whereupon, Helen setting the example, all the five princesses fell upon Jinny's neck and hugged and kissed her and each other amidst their tears.

"And we mustn't tell Red-Head," said Jinny; "he'd be *so* disappointed. He did his best. I never thought of saying she wasn't to be dressed. He's going away to-morrow, and of course they wouldn't change the doll after he comes back. Besides, she *is* better than nothing, surely?"

Christmas Eve—the six princesses sat on the window-sill looking out on the fast-falling snow. Dolly—partially denuded of her gorgeous attire, but looking rather woe-begone, if less self-satisfied and vulgar, for new clothes "to take on and off," and of irreproachable good taste, are not to be fashioned by little fingers in a day—was reposing in Butter-ball's fat arms. They "took turns" of her, as was the fairest arrangement under the circumstances of six little girls and only one doll; and, true to the sound philosophy of her being "better than nothing," a certain half-



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"What could be lovelier, what more perfect, than the six exquisite dolls, each more beautiful than her sister."

contemptuous affection for her had taken the place of the first dislike.

Suddenly—rat-tat-tat at the front knocker.

“The postman,” said Helen. “*Possibly* there may be a Christmas card for us.”

It was for “us,” but it was not a card. No; a letter, addressed outside to Helen as the eldest, but inside beginning “My six dear little nieces.”

“From Aunt Ginevra,” Helen exclaimed; “and oh, she is coming home at last. And oh, oh, just fancy, we are all to go to live with her. And—and—”

“Read it aloud,” said Jinny quickly. But Helen was all trembling with excitement. Jinny seized it and read.

Delightful news truly for the six imprisoned princesses!

“She *must* be nice,” said Jinny; “she writes so sweetly. And what can the presents be that she says she is sending us for Christmas?”

Agatha looked over her shoulder.

“I have chosen what I think would have pleased me most when I was a little girl. The box is sent off by express from Paris, where your uncle and I are resting for a few days, so that you may have it by Christmas. And before the new year begins, my darlings, I hope to be at last with you.”

Rat-tat-tat again. The railway van this time. Such a big box comes up to the nursery. Dear, dear, what a business to get it opened. How the six pairs of eyes shine, how the six pairs of hands tremble with eagerness as each undoes her own specially marked parcel. And oh, the cries of delight at last! What could be lovelier, what more perfect, than the six exquisite dolls, each more beautiful than her sisters!

“Real wax, real hair, real everysing,” cries Princess Baby.

“One suit of clothes ready, taking off and on ones, and lots of stuff to make more,” adds Butter-ball.

"Oh, how sweet Auntie must be, how happy we are going to be!" cry all.

But Jinny's face is sad.

"My poor, ugly dolly," she murmurs. "And oh, what shall I say if Auntie asks for my jug?"

"We'll tell her—all of us together. It was all for our sakes you did it, and so she can't be angry," say the other five.

"And Jinny, I do think the old doll would make a beautiful maid for the others; she really couldn't look vulgar in a neat print frock and white apron."

Ginevra brightens up at this.

"All the same," she said, "I wish now we had waited a little and believed that Auntie would come as soon as she could. I see that it would have been better. And oh, I do so hope she won't be vexed."

She was not vexed; only very, *very* sorry. More deeply sorry than the princesses themselves could understand.

"I had no idea of it all," said poor Auntie. "Yet I could not have come to you sooner, my darlings. Still—if I had known—But it is all over now, and you are going to be as happy as ever your Auntie can make you."

"And it's *almost* the same as having a mamma, isn't it?" said Baby, satisfied that in this possession she had an undoubted share.

The mug was reclaimed. And the dealer, who had paid far too little for it, was well frightened by no less a person than Uncle himself.

Poor Red-Head never knew how he had failed. But Auntie, who got to know his father and mother, was able, without hurting his feelings, to make him understand that little boys do well to keep out of such transactions even when inspired by the kindest of motives.

TOO BAD

“It is the mynd that maketh good or ill,
That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore.”

SPENSER.

CHAPTER I

“It’s too bad!” said Miss Judy; “I declare it’s really *too bad!*” and she came stumping along the road after her nurse, looking decidedly “put out.”

“It would be something new if it wasn’t too bad with you, Miss Judy, about something or other,” said nurse coolly.

Miss Judy was a kind-hearted, gentle-mannered little girl. She was pretty and healthy and clever—the sort of child any parents might have been proud of, any brothers and sisters fond of, had not all her niceness been spoiled by one most disagreeable fault. She was *always* grumbling. The hot days of summer, the cold days of winter, the rain, the wind, the dust, might, to hear her speak, have been expressly contrived to annoy her. When it was fine and the children were to go out for a walk, Miss Judy was sure to have something she particularly wanted to say in for; when it rained, and the house was evidently the best place for little people, Miss Judy was quite certain to have set her heart upon going out. She grumbled at having to get up, she grumbled at having to go to bed, she grumbled at lessons, she grumbled at play; she *could* not see that little contradictions and annoyances came to everybody in the world, and that the only way to do is to meet them bravely and sensibly. She really seemed to believe that nobody had so much to bear as she; that on her poor little shoulders all the tiresomenesses and disappointments, and “going the wrong way” of things, were heaped in double, and more than double quantities, and she persuaded herself that everybody she saw was better off than herself, and that no one else had such troubles to bear. So children, you will not be sur-

prised to hear that poor Miss Judy was not loved or respected as much as some little girls who perhaps *really* deserved love and respect less. For this ugly disagreeable fault of hers hid all her good qualities; and just as flowers can not flourish when shaded from the nice bright sun by some rank, wide-spreading weed, so Judy's pretty blossoms of kindness and unselfishness and truthfulness, which were all really *there*, were choked and withered by this poisonous habit of grumbling.

I do not really remember what it was she was grumbling at this particular morning. I dare say it was that the roads were muddy, for it was autumn, and Judy's home was in the country. Or, possibly, it was only that nurse had told her to walk a little quicker, and that immediately her boots began to hurt her, or the place on her heel where once there *had been* a chilblain got sore, or the elastic of her hat was too loose, and her hat came flopping down on to her face. It might have been any of these things. Whatever it was, it was "too bad." *That*, whenever Miss Judy was concerned, you might be quite, quite sure of.

They were returning home from rather a long walk. It was autumn, as I said, and there had been a week or two of almost constant rain, and certainly country lanes are *not* very pleasant at such times. If Judy had not grumbled so at everything, she might have been forgiven for this special grumble (if it was about the roads), I do think. It was getting chilly and raw, and the clouds looked as if the rain was more than half thinking of turning back on its journey to "Spain," or wherever it was it had set off to. Nurse hurried on; she was afraid of the little ones in the perambulator catching cold, and she could not spare time to talk to Miss Judy any longer.

Judy came after her slowly; they were just passing some cottages, and at the door of one of them stood a girl of about Judy's age, with her mouth open, staring at "the little gentry." She had heard what had passed between Judy and her nurse,

and was thinking it over in her own way. Suddenly Judy caught sight of her.

"What are you staring at so?" she said sharply. "It's too bad of you. You are a rude little girl. I'll tell nurse how rude you are."

Judy did not generally speak so crossly, especially not to poor children, for she had really nice feelings about such things, but she was very much put out, and ashamed too, that her ill-natured words to nurse should have been overheard, so she expressed her vexation to the first object that came in her way. The little girl did not leave off staring at her; in fact she did so harder than before. But she answered Judy gently, growing rather red as she did so; and Judy felt her irritation cool.

"I didn't mean no offence," she said. "I were just looking at you, and thinking to be sure how nice you had everything, and a-wondering how it could be as you weren't pleased."

"Who said I wasn't pleased?" said Judy.

"You said as something was a deal too bad," replied the child.

"Well, so it was,—it must have been, I mean,—or else I wouldn't have said so," answered Judy, who, to tell the truth had by this time quite forgotten what particular trouble had been the cause of her last grumble. "How do you mean that I have everything so nice?"

"Your things, miss—your jacket and your frock, and all them things. And you live in such a fine house, and has servants to do for you and all. O my! wouldn't I change with you. Nothing would never be too bad for *me* if I was you, miss."

"I dare say you think so," said Judy importantly, "but that just shows that you don't know better. I can tell you I have a great, great many troubles and things to bear that you have no idea of. Indeed, I dare say you are *far* happier than I. You are not bothered about keeping your frocks clean, and not getting your feet wet, and all those horrible things. And

about lessons. I dare say you have no trouble at all about lessons. You don't go to school, do you?"

"Not now, miss. It's more than six months since I've been. Mother's wanted me so badly to mind baby. Father did say as perhaps I should go again for a bit come Christmas," answered the little girl, who was growing quite at ease with Judy.

"And do you like going?" said Judy.

"Pretty well, but it's a long walk—winter time 'specially," said the child! "not but what most things is hard then to them as lives in places like ours. 'Tisn't like for you, miss, with lots of fires, and no need for to go out if it's cold or wet."

"Indeed I have to go out very often—indeed, always almost when I don't want," retorted Judy. "Not that I should mind the walk to school. I should like it; it would be far nicer than horrid lessons at home, cooped up in the same room all the time, with no change. You don't understand a bit; I am quite *sure* you haven't as many troubles as I."

The little girl smiled, but hardly seemed convinced. "Seems to me, miss, as if you couldn't hardly know, unless you tried, what things is like in places like ours," she said.

But before Judy could reply, a voice from inside the cottage called out, "Betsy, my girl, what are you about so long? Father'll be in directly, and there's the tea to see to."

The voice was far from unkind, but its effect on Betsy was instantaneous.

"I must go, miss," she said; "mother's calling;" and off she ran.

"How nice and funny it must be to set the tea for her father," thought Judy, as she walked on. "I should like that sort of work. What a silly girl she is not to see how much fewer troubles she has than I. I only wish——"

"*What* did you say you wished?" interrupted a voice that seemed to come out of the hedge, so suddenly did its owner appear before Judy.

"I didn't say I wished anything—at least I didn't know I was speaking aloud," said the little girl, as soon as she found voice to reply.

The person who had spoken to her was a little old woman, with a scarlet cloak that nearly covered her. She had a basket on her arm, and looked as if she was returning from market. There was nothing very remarkable about her, and yet Judy felt startled and a little frightened, she did not quite know why.

"I didn't know I was speaking aloud," she repeated, staring half timidly at the old woman.

"Didn't you?" she replied. "Well, now I think of it, I don't remember saying that you did. There's more kinds of speaking than with tongue and words. What should you say if I were to tell you what it was you were wishing just now?"

"I don't know," said Judy, growing more alarmed. "I think, please, I had better run on. Nurse will be wondering where I am."

"You didn't think of that when you were standing chattering to little Betsy just now," said the old woman.

"Did you hear us?" asked Judy, her astonishment almost overcoming her alarm. "Where were you standing? I didn't see you."

"I dare say not. There's many things besides what *you* see, my dear. For instance, you don't see why Betsy should think it would be a fine thing to be you, and perhaps *Betsy* doesn't see why you should think it would be a fine thing to be in her place instead of in *your own*."

Judy's eyes opened wider and wider. "Did you hear all that?" she exclaimed.

The old woman smiled.

"So you really would like to be Betsy for a change?" she said.

"Not exactly for a *change*," answered Judy. "It isn't that I am *tired* of being myself, but I am sure no other little

girl in the world has so many troubles; that is why I would rather be Betsy. You have no idea what troubles I have," she went on, "and I can never do *anything* I like. It's always 'Miss Judy, you must,' or 'Miss Judy, you mustn't,' all day long. And if ever I am merry for a little, then nurse tells me I shall wake baby. O! he *is* such a cross baby!"

"And do you think *Betsy's* baby brothers and sisters are never cross?" inquired the old woman.

"O no, I dare say they are; but then she's allowed to scold and punish them, and I may never say anything, however tiresome the little ones are. If I might put baby in the corner when he is naughty, I would soon cure him. But I may never do *anything* I want; it's *too* bad."

"Poor thing, poor thing! it *is* too bad, a great deal too bad. I do feel for you," said the old woman.

But when Judy looked up there was a queer twinkle in her eyes, which made her by no means sure whether she was laughing at her or not. The little girl felt more than half inclined to be affronted, but before she had time to decide the point, the old woman interrupted her.

"Look here, my dear," she said, lifting up the lid of the basket on her arm; "to show you that I am in earnest, see what I will do for you. Here is a nice rosy-cheeked apple; put it into your pocket, and don't let any one see it, and when you are in bed at night, if you are still of the same mind about being Betsy instead of yourself, just take a bite of the apple, then turn round and go to sleep, and in the morning you shall see what you shall see."

Half hesitatingly, Judy put out her hand for the apple.

"Thank you very much," she said, "but" —

"But what?" said the old woman rather sharply.

"Must I *always* be Betsy, if I try being her?"

"Bless the child, what will she have?" exclaimed the old woman. "No, you needn't go on being Betsy if you don't want.

Keep the apple, take care you don't lose it, and when you've had enough of a change, take another bite. But after that, remember the apple can do no more for you."

"I dare say I shall not want it to do anything for me once I have left off being myself," said Judy. "Oh, how nice it will be not to have nurse ordering me about all day long, and not to be bothered about keeping my frock clean, and to have no lessons!"

"I'm glad you're pleased," said the old woman. "Now, good-bye; you won't see me again till you want me."

"Good-bye, and thank"—"thank you very much," she was going to have said, holding out her hand as she spoke—for remember she was not a rude or ill-mannered little girl by any means—but, lo and behold, there was nobody there! The old woman had disappeared! Judy rubbed her eyes, and stared about her in every direction, but there was nothing to be seen—nothing, that is to say, in the least like an old woman, only some birds hopping about quite unconcernedly, and a tiny field-mouse, who peeped up at Judy for an instant with its bright little eyes, and then scurried off to its hole.

It was growing late and dusk, the mists were creeping up from the not far distant sea, and the hills were thinking of putting on their night-caps, and retiring from view. Judy felt a little strange and "eerie," as she stood there alone in the lane. She could almost have fancied she had been dreaming, but there was the rosy-cheeked apple in her hand, proof positive to the contrary. So Judy decided that the best thing she could do was to run home as fast as she could, and consider at her leisure if she should make use of the little old woman's gift.

It was nearly dark when she reached the garden gate—at least the trees on each side of the carriage-drive made it seem so. Judy had never been out so late alone before, and she felt rather frightened as to what nurse would say. The side door was open, so she ran in, and went straight up to the nursery. Just as she

got upstairs she met nurse, her shawl and bonnet on, her kind old face looking hot and anxious. At sight of the truant she stopped short.

“So there you are, Miss Judy,” she exclaimed; “and a nice fright you’ve given me. It’s my turn to speak about ‘too bad’ now, I think. It really was too bad of you to stay behind like that, and me never thinking but what you were close behind till this moment; at least, that you had come in close behind, and had stayed down in the drawing-room for a little. You’ve frightened me out of my wits, you naughty child; and if only your mamma was at home, I would go straight downstairs, and tell her it’s more than I can put up with.”

“It’s more than I can put up with to be scolded so for nothing,” said Judy crossly, and with a tone in her voice new to her, and which rather took nurse aback. She had not meant to be harsh to the child, but she had been really frightened, and, as is often the case, on finding there had been no cause for her alarm, a feeling of provocation took its place.

“You should not speak so, Miss Judy,” she said quietly, for she was wise enough not to wish to irritate the little girl, whom she truly loved, further.

But Judy was not to be so easily pacified.

“It’s too bad,” she began as usual; “it’s a great deal too bad, that I should never be allowed to do the least thing I want; to be scolded so for nothing at all—just staying out for two or three minutes;” and she “banged about” the nursery, dragging her hat off, and kicking her boots into the corner in an extremely indignant manner.

Nurse felt much distressed. To Judy’s grumbling she was accustomed, but this was worse than grumbling. “What can have come over the child?” she said to herself, but to Judy she thought it best to say nothing at all. All through tea Judy looked far from amiable; she hardly spoke, though a faint “Too bad” was now and then heard from her direction. Poor nurse

had not a very pleasant time of it, for the "cross" infection spread, as, alas! it is too apt to do, and little Lena, Judy's four-years-old sister, grew peevish and discontented, and pinched Master Baby, in return for which he, as was to be expected, set up a dismal howl.

"Naughty, horrid little things!" said Judy. "If I had *my* way with them, they should both be whipped and put to bed."

"Hush, Miss Judy!" said nurse. "If you would be pleasant and help to amuse them, they would not be so cross."

"I've something else to do than to amuse such ill-natured little things," said Judy.

"Well, I should think it *was* time you learnt your lessons for to-morrow," said nurse. "We've had tea so late, it will soon be time for you to be dressed to go down to the drawing-room to your papa. There are some gentlemen dining with him to-night."

"I can't bear going down when mamma's away," said Judy. "It's too bad of her to go away and leave us."

"For shame, Miss Judy, to speak so, when you know that it's only because your poor aunt is so ill that your mamma had to go away. Now get your books, there's a good girl, and do your lessons."

"I'm not going to do them," said Judy, with sudden resolution. "I needn't unless I like. I don't think I shall ever do any more. It's too bad I should never have a minute of time to myself."

Nurse really began to think the little girl must be going to be ill. Never, in all her experience of her, had she known her so cross. It was the same all the evening. Judy grumbled and stormed at everything; she would not stand still to have her hair brushed, or her pretty white muslin frock fastened; and when she came upstairs she was more ill pleased than before, because, just as she was beginning to amuse herself with some pictures, her papa told her he thought it was time for little girls to be in bed. How often, while she was being undressed, she declared

that something or other was "too bad," I really could not undertake to say. She grumbled at her nice warm bath, she grumbled at her hair being combed out, she grumbled at having to go to bed when she wasn't "the least bit sleepy," she grumbled at everything and everybody, herself included, for she came to the resolution that she really would not be herself any longer! No sooner had nurse and the candle left the room than Judy drew out the apple, which, while nurse was not looking, she had managed to hide under her pillow, took a good big bite of it, turned round on her side, and notwithstanding that her little heart was beating much faster than usual, half with excitement, half with fear, at what she had done, in two minutes she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER II.

"BETSY, Betsy girl, it's time you were stirring. Up with you, child; you must look sharp."

What voice was that? Who could it be, shouting so loudly, and waking her up in the middle of the night? Judy for a moment felt very indignant, but she was extremely sleepy, and determined to think she was dreaming; so she turned round, and was just dozing off, when again she heard the cry:

"Betsy, Betsy, wake up with thee. Whatever's come to the child this morning?"

The voice seemed to come nearer and nearer, and at last a thump on the wall, close to Judy's head, it seemed to her, fairly startled her awake.

"Up with thee, child," sounded close to her ear. "Baby's been that cross all night I've had scarce a wink o' sleep. Thee mustn't lie snoring there."

Suddenly all returned to Judy's memory. She was not herself; she was Betsy.

"I'm coming," she called out, hardly knowing what she was saying; and then the person on the other side of the wall seemed to be satisfied, for Judy now heard her walking about, clattering fire-irons and pots and pans, evidently employed in tidying the kitchen.

It was still what Judy thought quite dark. She had some idea of calling for a light, but whom to call to she did not know. So, feeling very strange and rather frightened, she got timidly out of bed, and by the little light that came in at the small square window, began to look about her. What a queer little place it was! Not a room really, only a sort of "lean-to" at one side of the kitchen, barely large enough for the narrow, rickety little bedstead, and one old chair that stood beside it, answering several purpose besides its proper one, for on it was placed a cracked basin and jug, and a tiny bit of looking glass, with a frame, fastened by a piece of string to the only remaining bar. Betsy's clothes lay in the bed, which was but poorly provided with proper blankets—the sheets were clean—everything in the place was as clean as poverty *can* be, and indeed Betsy was, and considered herself to be, a very fortunate little girl for having a "room" of her own at all; but to Judy, Judy who had had no training like Betsy's, Judy who found every crumple in a rose-leaf "too bad," Judy who knew as little of other people's lives and other peoples troubles as the man in the moon,—you can fancy, my dears, how the room of which little Betsy was so proud looked to *Judy!* But she had a spirit of her own, ready though she was to grumble. With a little shiver, she began to try to dress herself in the well-mended clothes, so different from her own daintily-trimmed little garments—for *washing* she felt to be out of the question; it was really *too* cold, and besides there were no soap, or sponges, or towels to be seen.

"I don't care," she said to herself stoutly, as she wriggled first into one garment and then into another. "I don't care. Anyway I shall have no lessons to learn, and I shall not be bothered about

keeping my frock clean. But I do wish the fairy had left me my own hair," she went on regretfully, examining the thick dark locks that hung round her face, and kept tumbling into her eyes, "my hair is *much* nicer. I don't believe Betsy ever has hers properly brushed, it *is* so tuggy. And what brown hands I've got, and such crooked nails. I wonder if Betsy's mother will cut them for me; I wonder if" —

She was interrupted by another summons.

"Betsy, girl, what *are* you after this morning? I be getting downright cross with you, child. There's father'll be back for breakfast directly, and you not helped me a hand's turn this blessed morning."

Judy started. She only stopped to fasten the last button of her little dark cotton frock, and calling out, "I'm coming," opened the rough door of the little bedroom, and found herself in the kitchen. There sat Betsy's mother, with the baby on her knee, and the baby but one tumbling about at her feet, while she vainly tried to fasten the frock of another little fellow of three, who sturdily refused to stand still.

"You must finish dressing Jock," she said, on catching sight of Judy; "Jock's a naughty boy, won't stand still for mammy to dress him; naughty Jock," she continued, giving him a little shake as she got up, which sent him howling across the room to Judy. "It's too bad of you, Betsy, to be so lazy this morning, and me so tired with no sleep, and the little ones all crying; if I tell father he'll be for giving it thee, lass, to make thee stir about a bit quicker."

"He'll give me *what*?" said Judy, perplexed. "I don't understand."

"Hold thy tongue; I'll have none of that answering back, child," said Betsy's mother, tired and out of patience, poor woman, though you must not think she was either harsh or unkind, for she was a very kind, good mother.

"Jock, let me dress you," said Judy, turning to the little

boy, with a vague idea that it would be rather amusing to act nurse to him. Jock came towards her willingly enough, but Judy found the business less easy than she had expected. There was a button missing on his little petticoat, which she did not find out in time to prevent her fastening it all crooked; and when she tried to undo it again, Jock's patience was exhausted, and he went careering round the kitchen, Judy after him, till the mother in despair caught hold of him, and completed the task.

"Your fingers seem to be all thumbs this morning," she said testily. "You've not swep' up a bit, nor made th' fire, nor nothing. Go and fetch water now to fill th' kettle, or father'll be in afore it's on the boil."

Judy turned to the fireplace, and, with some difficulty, managed to lug the heavy old kettle as far as the front door. Just outside stood the pump, but try as she might she could not get the water to flow. She was ready to cry with vexation, pumping had always seemed such nice easy work; she had often watched the children of these very cottages filling their kettles and jugs, and had envied them the fun; but now when she had it to do she found it very different—*very* poor fun, if indeed fun at all! At last she got the water to begin to come, a poor miserable little trickle; at this rate the kettle would *never* be filled, and her tears were preparing to descend, when a rough hearty voice made her jump. It was Betsy's father.

"Pump's stiff this morning, is it, my lass?" he called out as he came up the path. "Let's have a hand at it;" and with his vigorous pull the water quickly appeared. He lifted the kettle into the kitchen, greatly to Judy's relief; but Betsy's mother took a different view of the matter.

"I don't know what's come to Betsy this morning," she said. "Lazy's no word for her. The porridge is ready, but there'll be no time to make thee a cup of coffee, father. She's been close upon a quarter of an hour filling the kettle, and baby's so cross this morning I can't put her down."

"I must make my breakfast of porridge then," said the father; "but Betsy, girl, it's new for thee to be lazy, my lass."

Judy felt humbled and mortified, but she said nothing. Somehow she felt as if she could not defend herself, though she knew she had honestly done her best. The words "too bad" rose to her lips, but she did not utter them. She began to wonder how little Betsy managed to get through her daily tasks, easy as she had imagined them to be.

The porridge was not much to her taste, but she tried to eat it. Perhaps it was not so much the porridge itself, for it was good of its kind, which took away her appetite, as the want of the many little things to which she was so accustomed that their absence made her for the first time think of them at all. The nice white table-cloth and silver spoons on the nursery table, the neat, pretty room, and freshly dressed little brothers and sisters—all were very different from the rough board, and the pewter spoons, and Betsy's father and big brothers hurriedly devouring the great bowls of porridge, while the three little ones cried or quarrelled incessantly. "After all," thought Judy, "perhaps it is a good thing to have *rather* a strict nurse, even if she is very fussy about being neat and all that."

But yet she felt very sorry for Betsy's mother, when she looked at her thin, careworn face, and noticed how patient she was with the babies, and how cheerfully she answered all "father's" remarks. And there began to dawn in the little girl's mind a faint idea that perhaps there were troubles and difficulties in the world such as she had never dreamt of, that there are a good many "too bards" in other people's lots as well as in Miss Judy's.

Breakfast over, her troubles began again. It was washing-day, and just as she was looking forward to a ramble in the fields in glorious independence of nurse's warnings about spoiling her frock, her dreams were put an end to by Betsy's mother's summoning her to take her place at the tub. And oh, my dears, *real* washing is very different work from the dolls' laundressing—

standing round a wash-hand basin placed on a nursery chair, and wasting ever so much beautiful honey-soap in nice clean hot water, and then when the little fat hands are all “crumpled” and puffy “like real washerwomen’s,” rinsing out the miniature garments in still nicer clean cold water, and hanging them round the nursery guard to dry, and most likely ending up by coaxing nurse to clear away all the mess you have made, and to promise to let you iron dolly’s clean clothes the next wet afternoon—which you think so delightful. Judy’s arms ached sorely, sorely, and her head ached too, and she felt all steamy and hot and weary, when at last her share of it was over, and, “for a change,” she was instructed to take the two youngest out for a walk up the lane, while mother boiled the potatoes for dinner.

The babies were very tiresome, and though Judy was quite at liberty to manage them in her own way, and to punish them as she had never ventured to punish Lena and Harry at home, she did not find it of much use. She wondered “how ever the real Betsy did;” and I fancy the babies too wondered a good deal in their own way as to what had come over their big sister to-day. Altogether the walk was very far from a pleasure to any of the three, and when at last Judy managed to drag her weary self, and her two hot, cross little charges home again to the cottage, she was by no means in an amiable humour. She would have liked to sit down and rest, and she would have liked to wash her face and hands, and brush her hair—Judy who at home *always* grumbled at nurse’s summons to “come and be tidied”—but there was no time for anything of the kind. Dinner—the potatoes, that is to say—was ready, and the table must be set at once, ready for father and the boys, and Betsy’s mother told her to “look sharp and bustle about,” in a way that Judy felt to be really a great deal “too bad.” She was hungry, however, and ate her share of potatoes, flavoured with a little dripping and salt, with more appetite than she had sometimes felt for roast mutton and rice pudding, though all the same she would have been

exceedingly glad of a little gravy, or even a plateful of *sago* pudding, which generally was by no means a favorite dish of hers.

"Me and the boys won't be home till late," said the father, as he rose to go; "there's a piece o' work master wants done this week, and he'll pay us extra to stay a couple of hours. Betsy must bring us our tea."

Judy's spirits rose. She would have a walk by herself anyway, unplagued by babies, and the idea of it gave her some patience for the afternoon's task of darning stockings, which she found was expected of her. Just at first the darning was rather amusing, but after a while she began to be sadly tired of it. It was very different from sitting still for a quarter of an hour, with nurse patiently instructing her, and praising her whenever she did well; *these* stockings were so very harsh and coarse, and the holes were so enormous, and the basketful so huge!

"I'll *never* get them done," she exclaimed at last. "I think it's too bad to make a little girl like me or Betsy do such hard work; and I think her father and brothers must make holes in their horrid stockings on purpose, I do. *I'll not* do any more."

She shoved the basket into a corner, and looked about for amusement. The babies were asleep, and Jock was playing in a corner, and mother, poor body, was still busy in the wash-house—Judy could find nothing to play with. There were no books in the cottage, except an old *Farmers' Almanac*, a Bible and Prayer-Book, and one or two numbers of a *People's Miscellany*, which Judy looked into, but found she could not understand. How she wished for some of her books at home! Even those she had read two or three times through, and was always grumbling at in consequence, would have been a great treasure; *even* a history or geography book would have been better than nothing.

Suddenly the clock struck, and Betsy's mother called out from the wash-house,

"It's three o'clock—time for you to be going with the tea. Set the kettle on, Betsy, and I'll come and make it and cut

the bread. It'll take you more nor half-an-hour to walk to Farmer Maxwell's where they're working this week."

Judy was staring out of the window. "It's beginning to rain," she said dolefully.

"Well, what if it is," replied Betsy's mother, "Father and boys can't want their tea because it's raining. Get thy old cloak, child. My goodness me!" she went on, as she came into the kitchen, "she hasn't got the kettle on yet? Betsy, it's too bad of thee, it is for sure; there's not a thing but what's been wrong to-day."

Judy's conscience pricked her about the stockings, so, without attempting to defend herself, she fetched the old cloak she had seen hanging in Betsy's room, and, drawing the hood over her head, stood meekly waiting, while the mother cut the great hunches of bread, made the tea, and poured it into the two tin cans, which the little girl was to carry to the farm.

It did not rain much when she first set off, so though it was a good two miles' walk, she was only moderately wet when she got to the farm. One of the boys was on the look-out for her, or rather for their tea, which he at once took possession of and ran off with, advising Judy to make haste home, it was going to rain like blazes. But poor Judy found it no easy matter to follow his counsel; her arms were still aching with the weight of the baby in the morning, and her wrist was chafed with the handle of one of the tin pails, which she could not manage otherwise to carry, the old cloak was poor protection against the driving rain, and, worst of all, Betsy's old boots had several holes in them, and a sharp stone had made its way through the sole of the left one, cutting and hurting her foot. She stumbled along for some way, feeling very miserable, till at last, quite unable to go farther, she sat down under the hedge, and burst into tears.

"So you haven't found things quite so pleasant as you expected, eh, Miss Judy? You don't find walking in Betsy's shoes quite such an easy matter after all?" said a voice at her side;

and, looking up, lo and behold! there, standing before her, Judy saw the old woman with the scarlet cloak.

"I don't think it is kind of you to laugh at me," she sobbed.

"It's 'too bad,' is it, eh, Miss Judy?"

Judy sobbed more vigorously, but did not answer.

"Come, now," said the old woman kindly. "Let's talk it over quietly. Are you beginning to understand that other people's lives have troubles and difficulties as well as yours—that little Betsy, for instance, might find things 'too bad' a good many times in the course of the day, if she was so inclined?"

"Yes," said Judy humbly.

"And on the whole," continued the fairy, "you would rather be yourself than any one else—eh, Miss Judy?"

"Oh yes, yes, a *great* deal rather," said Judy eagerly. "Mayn't I be myself again now this very minute, and go home to tea in the nursery? Oh, I *would* so like! It seems ever so long since I saw Lena and Harry and nurse, and you said yesterday I needn't keep on being Betsy if I didn't like."

"Not quite so fast, my dear," said the old woman. "It's only four o'clock; you must finish the day's work. Go back to the cottage and wait patiently till bedtime, and then—you know what to do—you haven't lost your apple?"

"No," said Judy, feeling in her pocket. "I have it safe."

"That's all right. Now jump up my dear, and hasten home, or Betsy's mother will be wondering what has become of you."

Judy got up slowly. "I'm *so* wet," she said, "and oh! my foot's *so* sore. These horrible boots! I think it's too——"

"Hush!" said the fairy. "How would you like me to make you stay as you are, till you quite leave off that habit of grumbling. I'm not sure but what it would be a good thing for her," she added, consideringly, as if thinking aloud.

"O no, *please* don't," said Judy. "please, *please* don't. I do beg your pardon; I didn't mean to say it, and I *won't* say it any more."

"Then off with you; your foot won't be so bad as you think," said the fairy.

"Thank you," replied Judy, fancying already that it hurt her less. She had turned to go when she stopped.

"Well," said the old woman, "what's the matter now?"

"Nothing," answered Judy, "but only I was thinking, if I am myself again to-morrow morning, and Betsy's *herself*, what will they all think, nurse and all, I mean? and if I try to explain, I'm sure they'll never believe me—they'll say I'm talking nonsense. Nurse always says 'rubbish' if we make up fairy stories, or anything like that."

The old woman smiled curiously.

"Many wiser people than nurse think that 'rubbish' settles whatever they don't understand," she said. "But never you mind, Judy. You needn't trouble your head about what any one will think. No one ever will be the wiser but you and I. When Betsy wakes in her own little bed in the morning, she will only think she has had a curious dream—a dream, perhaps, which will do her no harm—and nurse will think nothing but that Miss Judy has been cured of grumbling in a wonderful way. For if you're *not* cured it will be *my* turn to say it's too bad!—will it not?"

"Yes," said Judy, laughing. "Thank you so much, kind fairy. Won't you come and see me again some time?"

But the last words were spoken to the air, for while Judy was uttering them the old woman had disappeared, and only the little field mouse again, with bright sparkling eyes, ran across the path, looking up fearlessly at Judy as it passed her.

'And Judy never did see the old woman again.

She went back to the cottage, bearing bravely the pain of her wounded foot, which was not so very bad after all, and the discomfort of her wet clothes.

And though Betsy's mother scolded her for having been so slow about her errand, she did not grumble or complain, but did her best to help the poor woman with the evening's work. All

the same, I can tell you, she was *very* glad to get to bed at night, and you may be sure she did not forget to take a great big bite of her apple.

“When I am myself again, I’ll spend the six shillings I have in my money-box to buy Betsy a nice new print frock instead of that ugly old one that got so soaked to-day,” was her last thought before she fell asleep.

And oh! my dears, *can* you imagine how delightful it was to find herself in the morning, her real own self again? She felt it was almost *too good* to be true. And, since then, it has been seldom, if ever, that Miss Judy has been heard to grumble, or that **anything** has been declared to be “too bad.”

“CARROTS:”

JUST A LITTLE BOY

CHAPTER I

FLOSS'S BABY

Where did you come from, Baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into the here?

* * * * *

But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here!

G. MACDONALD.

HIS real name was Fabian. But he was never called anything but Carrots. There were six of them. Jack, Cecil, Louise, Maurice, commonly called Mott, Floss, dear, dear Floss, whom he loved best of all, a long way the best of all, and lastly Carrots.

Why Carrots should have come to have his history written I really cannot say. I must leave you, who understand such things a good deal better than I, you, children, for whom the history is written, to find out. I can give you a few reasons why Carrot's history should *not* have been written, but that is about all I can do. There was nothing very remarkable about him; there was nothing very remarkable about the place where he lived, or the things that he did, and on the whole he was very much like other little boys. There are my *no* reasons for you. But still he was Carrots, and after all, perhaps, that was *the* reason! I shouldn't wonder.

He was the baby of the family; he had every right to be considered the baby, for he was not only the youngest, but very much the youngest; for Floss, who came next to him, was nearly four years older than Carrots. Yet he was never treated as the baby. I doubt if even at the very outset of his little life, when he was just a wee pink ball of a creature, rolled up in flannel,

and with his funny curls of red hair standing crisp up all over his head, I doubt, if even then, he was ever called "baby." I feel almost sure it was always "Carrots." He was too independent and sensible to be counted a baby, and he was never fond of being petted—and then, too, "Carrots" came so naturally!

I have said that Carrots loved his sister Floss better than anybody or anything else in the world. I think one reason of this was that she was the very first person he could remember in his life, and a happy thing for him that it was so, for all about her that there was to remember was nice and good and kind. She was four years older than he, four years old, that is to say, when he first came into the world and looked about him with grave inquiry as to what sort of a place this could be that he had got to. And the first object that his baby-wise eyes settled upon with content, as if in it there might be a possible answer to the riddle, was Floss!

These children's father and mother were not very rich, and having six boys and girls you can quite easily imagine they had plenty to do with their money. Jack was a great boy at school when Carrots first joined the family party, and Cecil and Louise had a governess. Mott learnt with the governess too, but was always talking of the time when he should go to school with Jack, for he was a very boy-ey boy, very much inclined to look down upon girls in general, and his sisters in particular, and his little sister Floss in *particular*est. So, till Carrots appeared on the scene, Floss had had rather a lonely time of it, for, "of course," Cecil and Louise, who had pockets in all their frocks, and could play the "March of the Men of Harlech" as a duet on the piano, were *far* too big to be "friends to Floss," as she called it. They were friendly and kind in an elder sisterly way, but that was quite a different sort of thing from being "friends to her," though it never occurred to Floss to grumble or to think, as so many little people think now-a-days, how much better things would have been arranged if *she* had had the arranging of them.

There was only one thing Floss wished for very, very much, and that was to have a brother or sister, she did not much care which, younger than herself. She had the most motherly heart in the world, though she was such a quiet little girl that very few people knew anything about what she was thinking, and the big ones laughed at her for being so outrageously fond of dolls. She had dolls of every kind and size, only alike in one thing, that none of them were very pretty, or what you would consider grand dolls. But to Floss they were lovely, only, they were *only* dolls!

Can you fancy, can you in the least fancy, Floss's delight—a sort of delight that made her feel as if she couldn't speak, when one winter's morning she was awakened by nurse to be told that a real live baby had come in the night—a little brother, and "such a funny little fellow," added nurse, "his head just covered with curly red hair. Where did he get that from, I wonder? Not one of my children has hair like that, though yours, Miss Flossie, has a touch of it, perhaps."

Floss looked at her own tangle of fluffy hair with new reverence. "Hair somesing like my hairs," she whispered. "Oh, nursie, dear nursie, may Floss see him?"

"Get up and let me dress you quickly, and you shall see him—no fear but that you'll see more of the poor little fellow than you care about," said nurse, though the last words were hardly meant for Floss.

The truth was that though of course every one meant to be kind to this new little baby, to take proper care of him, and all that sort of thing, no one was particularly glad he had come. His father and mother felt that five boys and girls were already a good number to bring up well and educate and start in life, not being very rich you see, and even nurse, who had the very kindest heart in the world, and had taken care of them all, beginning with Jack, ever since they were born, even nurse felt, I think, that they *could* have done without this red-haired little stranger. For nurse was no longer as young as she had been,

and as the children's mother could not, she knew, very well afford to keep an under-nurse to help her, it was rather trying to look forward to beginning again with all the "worry" of a new baby—bad nights and many tiring climbs up the long stairs to the nursery, etc., etc., though nurse was so really good that she did not grumble the least bit, and just quietly made up her mind to make the best of it.

But still Floss was the only person to give the baby a really hearty welcome. And by some strange sort of baby instinct he seemed to know it almost from the first. He screamed at Jack, and no wonder, for Jack, by way of salutation, pinched his poor little nose, and said that the next time they had boiled mutton for dinner, cook need not provide anything but turnips, as there was a fine crop of carrots all ready, which piece of wit was greatly applauded by Maurice and the girls. He wailed when Cecil and Louise begged to be allowed to hold him in their arms, so that they both tumbled him back on to nurse's lap in a hurry, and called him "a cross, ugly little thing." Only when little Floss sat down on the floor, spreading out her knees with great solemnity, and smoothing her pinafore to make a nice place for baby, and nurse laid him carefully down in the embrace of her tiny arms, "baby" seemed quite content. He gave a sort of wriggle, like a dog when he has been pretending to burrow a hole for himself in the rug, just before he settles down and shuts his eyes, and in half a second was fast asleep.

"Baby loves Floss," said Floss gravely, and as long as nurse would let her, till her arms really ached, there she sat on the floor, as still as a mouse, holding her precious burden.

It was wonderful how trusty she was. And "as handy," said nurse, "indeed far more handy than many a girl of five times her age." "I have been thinking," she said, one day to Floss's mother, "I have been thinking, ma'am, that even if you had been going to keep an under-nurse to help with baby, there would have been nothing for her to do. For the help I get from Miss Flossie

is really astonishing, and Master Baby is that fond of her already, you'd hardly believe it."

And Floss's mother kissed her, and told her she was a good little soul, and Floss felt, oh, so proud! Then a second thought struck her, "Baby dood too, mamma," she said, staring up into her mother's face with her bright, searching, gray-green eyes.

"Yes," said her mother with a little sigh, "poor baby is good too, dear," and then she had to hurry off to a great overhauling of Jack's shirts, which were, if possible, to be made to last him another half-year at school.

So it came to pass that a great deal of Floss's life was spent in the nursery with Carrots. He was better than twenty dolls, for after a while he actually learnt, first to stand alone, and then to walk, and after a longer while he learnt to talk, and to understand all that Floss said to him, and by and by to play games with her in his baby way. And how patient Floss was with him! It was no wonder he loved her.

This chapter has seemed almost more about Floss than Carrots you will say, perhaps, but I couldn't tell you anything of Carrots' history without telling you a great deal about Floss too, so I dare say you won't mind. I dare say too you will not care to hear much more about Carrots when he was a baby, for, after all, babies are all very like each other, and a baby that wasn't like others would not *be* a baby! To Floss I fancy he seemed a remarkable baby, but that may have been because he was her very own, and the only baby she had ever known. He was certainly very good, in so far as he gave nurse exceedingly little trouble, but why children should give trouble when they are perfectly well, and have everything they can possibly want, I have never been able to decide. On the whole, I think it must have something to do with the people who take care of them, as well as with themselves.

Now we will say good-by to Carrots, as a baby.

CHAPTER II

SIX YEARS OLD

“As for me, I love the sea,
The dear old sea!
Don’t you?”

SONG.

I THINK I said there was nothing very remarkable about the place where Carrots lived, but considering it over, I am not quite sure that you would agree with me. It was near the sea for one thing, and *that* is always remarkable, is it not? *How* remarkable, how wonderful and changeful the sea is, I doubt if any one can tell who has not really lived by it, not merely visited it for a few weeks in the fine summer time, when it looks so bright and sunny and inviting, but lived by it through autumn and winter too, through days when it looks so dull and leaden, that one can hardly believe it will ever be smiling and playful again, through fierce, rough days, when it lashes itself with fury, and the wind wails as if it were trying to tell the reason.

Carrots’ nursery window looked straight out upon the sea, and many and many an hour Floss and he spent at this window, watching their strange fickle neighbour at his gambols. I do not know that they thought the sea at all wonderful. I think they were too much accustomed to it for that, but they certainly found it very *interesting*. Floss had names for the different kinds of waves; some she called “ribs of beef,” when they showed up sideways in layers as it were, of white and brown, and some she called “ponies.” That was the kind that came prancing in, with a sort of dance, the white foam curling and rearing, and tossing itself, just exactly like a frisky pony’s mane. Those were the prettiest waves of all, I think.

It was not at all a dangerous coast, where the Cove House, that was Carrots’ home, stood. It was not what is called “picturesque.” It was a long flat stretch of sandy shore, going on

and on for miles just the same. There were very few trees and no mountains, not even hills.

In summer, a few, just a very few visitors used to come to Sandyshore for bathing; there were always visitors with children, for every one said it was such a nice safe place for the little people.

But, safe as it was, it wasn't till Carrots was growing quite a big boy, nearly six, I should think, that Floss and he got leave to go out and play on the shore by themselves, the thing they had been longing for ever since they could remember.

This was how they did get leave at last. Nurse was very, very busy, one day; really quite extra busy, for she was arranging and helping to pack Jack's things to go to a new school. Jack was so big now, about sixteen, that he was going to a kind of college, or grown-up school, the last he would go to before entering the army. And there was quite a fuss in the house. Jack thought himself almost as grand as if he was an officer already, and Mott was overpowered with envy. Everybody was fussing about Jack, and no one had much time to think of the two little ones.

They stood at the nursery window, poor little souls, when Floss came up from her lessons, gazing out wistfully. It was a nice spring day, not exactly sunny, but looking as if the sun were only hiding himself to tease you, and might come out any minute.

“If we *might* go down to the shore,” said Floss, half to herself, half to Carrots, and half to nurse. I shouldn't have said it so, for there can't be three halves of anything, but no doubt you will understand.

“Go down to the shore, my dear?” repeated nurse, “I wish you could, I'm sure, but it will be afternoon, at least, before I have a minute to spare to take you. And there's no one else to-day, for cook and Esther are both as busy as busy. Perhaps Miss Cecil and Miss Louise will take you when they have done their lessons.”

"We don't care to go with them, much," said Floss, "they don't understand our plays. We like best to go with you, nursie, and you to sit down with your sewing near—that's the nicest way. Oh, nurse," she exclaimed with sudden eagerness, "wouldn't you let us go alone? You can peep out of the window and see us every few minutes, and we'll be so good."

Nurse looked out of the window doubtfully.

"Couldn't you play in the garden at the back, instead?" she said. "Your papa and mamma won't be home till late, and I am always in a terror of any harm happening while they are away."

"We won't let any harm happen," said Floss, "and we are *so* tired of the garden, nurse. There is nothing to play at there. The little waves are so pretty this morning."

There was certainly very little to play at in the green, at the back of the house, which was called the garden. Being so near the sea, the soil was so poor that hardly any flowers would grow, and even the grass was coarse and lumpy. Then there were no trees, and what is a garden without trees?

Nurse looked out of the window again.

"Well," she said, "if you will really be very good, I think I might trust you. Now, Master Carrots, you will promise to do exactly what Miss Floss tells you?"

"Yes, I promise," said Carrots, who had been listening with great anxiety, though he had not hitherto spoken—he was not a great talker—"I promise, nurse. I will do exactly what Floss tells me, and Floss will do exactly what I tell her, won't you, Floss? So we shall both be *quite* good, that way, won't we?"

"Very well," said nurse gravely, though she felt very much inclined to laugh, "then run and get your things as fast as you can."

And, oh, how happy the two were when they found themselves out on the shore all alone! They were so happy, they did not know what to do; so first of all, they ran races to run

away a little of the happiness. And when they had run themselves quite hot, they sat down on a little heap of stones to consider what they should do next. They had no spades with them, for they did not care very much about digging; children who live always by the sea never care so much about digging as the little visitors who come down in the summer, and whose very first idea at the sight of the sea is "spades and buckets."

"What shall we play at Carrots?" said Floss. "I wish it was warm enough to paddle."

Carrots looked at the little soft rippling waves, contemplatively.

"When I'm a man," he said, "I shall paddle *always*. I shall paddle in winter too. When I'm a man I won't have no nurse."

"Carrots," said Floss, reproachfully, "that isn't good of you. Think how kind nurse is."

"Well, then," replied Carrots, slowly, "I *will* have her, but she must let me paddle always, when I'm a man."

"When you are a man, Carrots," said Floss, solemnly still, "I hope you will have something better to do than paddling. Perhaps you'll be a soldier, like Jack."

"Killing people isn't better than paddling," retorted Carrots. "I'd rather be a sailor, like papa."

"Sailors have to kill people, too, sometimes," said Floss.

"*Have* they?" said Carrots. Then he sat silent for a few minutes, finding this new idea rather overwhelming. "Naughty people, do you mean, Floss?" he inquired at last.

"Yes," said Floss, unhesitatingly, "naughty people of course."

"But I don't like killing," said Carrots, "not killing naughty people, I don't like. I won't be a soldier, and I won't be a sailor, and I won't be a butcher, 'cos butchers kill lambs. Perhaps I'll be a fisherman."

"But fishermen kill fish," said Floss.

“Do they?” said Carrots, looking up in her face pathetically with his gentle brown eyes. “I’m so sorry. I don’t understand about killing, Floss. I don’t like it.”

“I don’t either,” said Floss; “but perhaps it has to be. If there was no killing we’d have nothing to eat.”

“Eggs,” said Carrots; “eggs and potatoes, and—and—cake?”

“But even that would be a *sort* of killing,” persisted Floss, though feeling by no means sure that she was not getting beyond her depth. “If we didn’t eat eggs they would grow into chickens, and so eating stops them; and potatoes have roots, and when they’re pulled up they don’t grow; and cake has eggs in, and—oh, I don’t know, let’s talk of something else.”

“What?” said Carrots. “Fairies?”

“If you like, or supposing we talk about when auntie comes and brings Sybil.”

“Yes,” said Carrots, “I like that best.”

“Well, then,” began Floss, “supposing it is late in the evening when they come. *You* would be in bed, Carrots, dear, but I would have begged to sit up a little longer and——”

“No, Floss, that isn’t nice. I won’t talk about Sybil, if you make it like that,” interrupted Carrots, his voice sounding as if he were going to cry. “Sybil isn’t not any bigger than me. I wouldn’t be in bed, Floss.”

“Very well, dear. Never mind, darling. I won’t make it like that. It was very stupid of me. No, Sybil and auntie will come just about our tea-time, and we shall be peeping along the road to see if the carriage from the station is coming, and when we hear it we’ll run in, and perhaps mamma will say we may stay in the drawing-room to see them. You will have one of your new sailor suits on, Carrots, and I shall have my white pique and blue sash, and nurse will have made the nursery tea-table look so nice—with a clean table-cloth, you know, and quite thin bread and butter, and jam, and, perhaps, eggs.”

"I won't eat one," interrupted Carrots; "I won't never eat eggs. I'll keep all mine that I get to eat, in a box, till they've growed into chickens."

"But they're boiled when you get them," said Floss; "they wouldn't grow into chickens when they're boiled."

Carrots sighed. "Well, never mind," he said, "go on, Floss."

"Well, then," started Floss again, "you see the nursery tea would look so nice that Sybil would be *sure* to ask her mamma to let her have tea with us, even though it was the first evening. Perhaps, you know, she would be rather *shy*, just at first, till she got to know us. So we would be very, very kind to her, and after tea we would show her all our things—the dolls, only—Carrots, I'm afraid the dolls are getting rather old."

"Are they?" said Carrots, sympathisingly. "When I'm a man I'll buy you such a *lot* of new dolls, Floss, and Sybil, too, if she likes dolls—does she, Floss?"

"I don't know. I should think so," said Floss. "When papa and mamma went to see auntie, they said Sybil was like a doll herself. I suppose she has beautiful blue eyes and long gold curls. That was a year ago; she must be bigger now. Carrots!"

"What?"

"We must get up and run about a little now. It's too cold to sit still so long, and if we get cold, nurse won't let us come out alone again."

Up jumped Carrots on to his sturdy little legs. "I'll run, Floss," he said.

"Floss," he began, when they stopped to take breath again, "once I saw a little boy with a hoop. It went so nice on the sands. I wish I had a hoop, Floss."

"I wish you had, dear," said Floss. "I'd buy you one, if I had any money. But I haven't, and we couldn't ask mamma, because I know," and Floss shook her head mysteriously, "I know poor mamma *hasn't any money to spare*. I must think of a plan to get some."

Carrots kept silence for about three-quarters of a minute. "Have you thinkened, Floss?" he asked, eagerly.

"Thought," gravely said Floss, "not thinkened. What about?"

"About a plan," replied Carrots. He called it "a pan," but Floss understood him.

"Oh, dear, no," said Floss, "not yet. Plans take a great lot of thinking. They're real things, you see, Carrots, not like fancies about fairies and Sybil coming."

"But when Sybil does come, that'll be real then," said Carrots.

"Of course," agreed Floss, "but fancying about it before, isn't real."

It took Carrots a little while to get this into his head. Then he began again.

"When will you have thinkened enough, Floss? By tea-time?"

"I don't know. No, I think you had better wait till to-morrow morning, and then perhaps the plan will be ready."

"Very well," said Carrots, adding, with a little sigh, "to-morrow morning is a long time, Floss."

"Not very," said Floss, consolingly. "Now Carrots, let's have one more race, and then we must go in."

CHAPTER III

PLANS

"'Have you invented a plan for it?' Alice inquired.
'Not yet,' said the knight."

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.

THE next morning Carrots woke very early, and the first thing he thought of was the plan. Floss and he slept in the night nursery, in two little beds, and nurse slept in a small room that had a door opening into the nursery. She used to sleep in the nursery herself, but now that Carrots was so big, Floss and he were

quite safe by themselves, and poor old nurse enjoyed having her own little room.

Floss was still asleep, so Carrots only climbed out of his own cot into hers, and crouched himself down at the foot, watching for her to wake. Floss looked very nice asleep; her "fuzzy" hair was tumbling over the pillow, and her cheeks looked pinker than when she was awake.

"I wonder what being asleep is," thought the little boy as he looked at her. "I always go away, such a long way, when I am asleep. I wonder if Floss does."

She couldn't have been very far away just then, for somehow, though Carrots sat so still, she seemed to know he was there. She turned round and half opened her eyes, then shut them as if she were trying to go to sleep again, then opened them once more, quite wide this time, and caught sight of the funny little figure beside her.

"Carrots," she said, in a sleepy voice, "Carrots, dear, what are you doing there? You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. May I come in 'aside you, Floss? I was only watching for you to wake; I didn't wake you, did I?" said Carrots, as Floss made room for him, and he poked his cold little toes down into a nice warm place, "I did so want to know if it was ready, for it's to-morrow morning now."

"If what's ready?" said Floss, for she was rather sleepy still.

"The plan for getting money."

"Oh!" said Floss. "Yes," she went on after thinking for a minute, "yes, it's nearly ready; at least I'm almost sure it is. But it's not quite ready for telling *you*, yet, Carrots."

Carrots looked terribly disappointed.

"I think," went on Floss, "I think it will be ready for telling you after breakfast. And if you like, you may listen to something I am going to ask nurse at breakfast, and, perhaps, that will help you to guess what the plan is."

At breakfast time Carrots was all ears. All ears and no tongue, so that nurse began to wonder if he was ill.

"I shouldn't like you to be ill the very day after Master Jack has gone," she said anxiously (Jack had gone up to town by the night train with his father), "one trouble at a time is quite enough for your poor mamma."

"Is Jack's going to the big school a trouble?" asked Floss, opening her eyes very wide, "I thought they were all very glad."

"My dear," said nurse solemnly, "one may be glad of a thing and sorry too. And changes mostly are good and bad together."

Floss did not say any more, but she seemed to be thinking about what nurse had said. Carrots was thinking too.

"When I'm a man," he said at last, "I won't go to a big school if Floss doesn't want me to."

Nurse smiled. "There's time enough to see about that," she said, "get on with your breakfast, Master Carrots; you'll never grow a big boy if you don't eat plenty."

"Nurse," said Floss, suddenly, "what's the dearest thing we eat? What costs most?"

"Meat, now-a-days, Miss Flossie," said nurse.

"Could we do without it?" asked Floss. Nurse shook her head.

"What could we do without?" continued the child. "We couldn't do without bread or milk, I suppose. What could we do without that costs money?"

"Most things do that," said nurse, who began to have a glimmering of what Floss was driving at, "but the money's well spent in good food to make you strong and well."

"Then isn't there anything we could do without—without it hurting us, I mean?" said Floss, in a tone of disappointment.

"Oh, yes," said nurse, "I dare say there is. Once a little boy and girl I knew went without sugar in their tea for a month, and their grandmother gave them sixpence each instead."

"Sixpence!" exclaimed Floss, her eyes gleaming.

"Sixpence each," corrected nurse.

"Two sixpences, that would be a shilling. Carrots, do you hear?"

Carrots had been listening with might and main, but was rather puzzled.

"Would two sixpennies pay for two hoops?" he whispered to Floss, pulling her pinafore till she bent her head down to listen.

"Of course they would. At least I'm almost sure. I'll ask nurse. Nurse dear," she went on in a louder voice, "do you think we might do that way—Carrots and I—about sugar, I mean?"

"I don't see that it would do you any harm," said nurse. "You must ask your mamma."

But Floss hesitated.

"I shouldn't much like to ask mamma," she said, and Carrots, who was listening so intently that he had forgotten all about his bread and milk, noticed that Floss's face grew red. "I shouldn't much like to ask mamma, because, nursie, dear, it is only that we want to get money for something for ourselves, and if we told mamma, it would be like asking her to *give* us the money. It wouldn't be any harm for us not to eat any sugar in our tea for a month, and you could keep the sugar in a packet all together, nurse, and *then* you might tell mamma that we had saved it, and she would give us a shilling for it. It would be quite worth a shilling, wouldn't it, nurse?"

"Oh, yes," said nurse, "I am sure your mamma would say it was." Then she considered a little. She was one of those truly trustworthy nurses whose notions are strong on the point of everything being told to "mamma." But she perfectly understood Floss's hesitation, and though she might not have been able to put her feeling into words, she felt that it might do the child harm to thwart her delicate instinct.

"Well, nurse?" said Floss, at last.

"Well, Miss Flossie, I don't think for once I shall be doing wrong in letting you have a secret. When will you begin? This is Thursday; on Saturday your mamma will give me the week's sugar—suppose you begin on Sunday? But does Master Carrots quite understand?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss, confidently, "he understands, don't you, dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Carrots, "we won't eat not any sugar, Floss and me, for a great long time, and nurse will tie it up in a parcel with a string round, and mamma will buy it and give us a great lot of pennies, and then, and then"—he began to jump about with delight—"Floss and me will go to the toy-shop and buy our hoops, won't we, Floss? Oh, I wish it was time to go now, don't you, Floss?"

"Yes, dear, a month's a good while to wait," said Floss sympathisingly. "May we go out on the shore again by ourselves this afternoon, nurse?"

"If it doesn't rain," said nurse; and Floss, who had half an hour to wait before it was time for her to join her sisters in the schoolroom, went to the window to have a look at the weather. She had not stood there for more than a minute when Carrots climbed up on to a chair beside her.

"It's going to rain, Floss," he said, "there are the little curly clouds in the sky that Matthew says come when it rains."

Floss looked up at the sky and down at the sea.

"The sea looks cross to-day," she said.

There were no pretty ripples this morning; the water looked dull and leaden.

"Floss," said Carrots, with a sigh, "I do get *so* tired when you are at lessons all the morning and I have *nucken* to do. Can't you think of a plan for me to have something to do?" Carrots' head was running on "plans."

Floss considered.

"Would you like to tidy my drawer for me?" she said. "This

isn't the regular day for tidying it, but it is in a mess, because I turned all the things upside down when I was looking for our race horses' reins yesterday. Will you put it *quite* tidy, Carrots?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*, dear Floss," said Carrots, "I'll put all the dolls neat, and all the pieces, and all the sewing things. Oh, dear, Floss, what nice plans you make."

So when Floss had gone to her lessons, and nurse was busy with her morning duties, in and out of the room, so as not to lose sight of Carrots, but still too busy to amuse him, he, with great delight, set to work at the drawer. It certainly was much in need of "tidying," and after trying several ways, Carrots found that the best plan was to take everything out, and then put the different things back again in order. It took him a good while, and his face got rather red with stooping down to the floor to pick up all the things he had deposited there, for the drawer itself was too heavy for him to lift out bodily, if, indeed, such an idea had occurred to him. It was the middle drawer of the cupboard, the top part of which was divided into shelves where the nursery cups and saucers and that sort of things stood. The drawer above Floss's was nurse's, where she kept her work, and a few books, and a little notepaper and so on; and the drawer at the bottom, so that he could easily reach it, was Carrots' own.

One end of Floss's drawer was given up to her dolls. She still had a good many, for though she did not care for them now as much as she used, she never could be persuaded to throw any of them away. But they were not very pretty; even Carrots could see that, and Carrots, to tell the truth, was very fond of dolls.

"If I had some money," he said to himself, "I would buy Floss such a most beautiful doll. I wish I had some money."

For the moment he forgot about the hoops and the "plan" and sat down on a little stool with one of the unhappiest looking of the dolls in his arms.

"I wish I could buy you a new face, poor dolly," he said.
"I wish I had some money."

He got up again to put poor dolly back into her corner. As he was smoothing down the paper which lined the drawer, he felt something hard close to dolly's foot; he pushed away the dolls to see—there, almost hidden by a crumple in the paper lay a tiny little piece of money—a little shining piece, about the size of a sixpence, only a different colour.

"A yellow sixpenny, oh, how nice!" thought Carrots, as he seized it. "I wonder if Floss knowed it was there. It would just do to buy a new doll. *I wish* I could go to the toy-shop to buy one to surprise Floss. I won't tell Floss I've found it. I'll keep it for a secret, and some day I'll buy Floss a new doll. I'm sure Floss doesn't know—I think the fairies must have put it there."

He wrapped the piece of money up carefully in a bit of paper, and after considering where he could best hide it, so that Floss should not know till it was time to surprise her, he fixed on a beautiful place—he hid it under one of the little round saucers in his paint-box—a very old paint-box it was, which had descended from Jack, first to Mott and then to Carrots, but which, all the same, Carrots considered one of his greatest treasures.

When nurse came into the room, she found the tidying of the drawer completed, and Carrots sitting quietly by the window. He did not tell her about the money he had found, it never entered into his little head that he should speak of it. He had got into the way of not telling all the little things that happened to him to any one but Floss, for he was naturally a very quiet child, and nurse was getting too old to care about all the tiny interests of her children as she once had done. Besides, he had determined to keep it a secret, even from Floss, till he could buy a new doll with it—but very likely he would have told her of it after all, had not something else put it out of his head.

The something else was that that afternoon nurse took Floss and him for a long walk, and a walk they were very fond of.

It was to the cottage of the old woman, who, ever since they had come to Sandyshore, had washed for them. She was a very nice old woman, and her cottage was beautifully clean, and now and then Floss and Carrots had gone with nurse to have tea with her, which was a great treat. But to-day they were not going to tea; they were only going because nurse had to pay Mrs. White some money for washing up Jack's things quickly, and nurse knew the old woman would be glad to have it, as it was close to the day on which she had to pay her rent.

Floss and Carrots were delighted to go, for even when they did not stay to tea, Mrs. White always gave them a glass of milk, and, generally, a piece of home-made cake.

Before they started, nurse went to her drawer and took out of it a very small packet done up in white paper, and this little packet she put into her purse.

It was, after all, a nice fine day. Floss and Carrots walked quietly beside nurse for a little, and then she gave them leave to run races, which made the way seem very short, till they got to Mrs. White's.

"How nice it will be when we have our hoops, won't it, Carrots?" said Floss.

Carrots had almost forgotten about the hoops, but now that Floss mentioned them, it put him in mind of something else.

"Wouldn't you like a new doll, Floss?" he said mysteriously, "a most beautifulst new doll, with hair like—like the angels' hair in the big window at church, and eyes like the little blue stones in mamma's ring?"

"Of course I would," said Floss, "and we'd call her Angelina, wouldn't we, Carrots? But it's no good thinking about it—I shall never have one like that, unless the fairies send it me!"

"If the fairies sended you money to buy one, wouldn't that

do?" said Carrots, staring up in her face with a funny look in his eyes.

But before Floss had time to answer, nurse called to them—they were at the corner of the lane which led to Mrs. White's.

Mrs. White was very kind. She had baked a cake only a day or two before, and cut off a beautiful big piece for each of the children, then she gave them a drink of milk, and they ran out into her little garden to eat their cake and look at the flowers, till nurse had finished her business with the old washerwoman, and was ready to go home.

Floss and Carrots thought a great deal of Mrs. White's garden. Small as it was, it had far more flowers in it than their own garden at the back of the Cove House, for it was a mile or two farther from the sea, and the soil was richer, and it was more sheltered from the wind.

In summer there was what Floss called quite a "buzzy" sound in this little garden—she meant that sweet, lazy-busy hum of bees and butterflies and all sorts of living creatures, that you never hear except in a real old-fashioned garden where there are lots of clove pinks and sweet williams and roses, roses especially, great, big, cabbage roses, and dear little pink climbing roses, the kind that peep in at a cottage window to bid you "good-morning." Oh, how very sweet those old-fashioned flowers are—though "rose fanciers" and all the clever gardeners we have now-a-days wouldn't give anything for them. *I* think them the sweetest of all. Don't you, children? Or is it only when one begins to grow old-fashioned oneself and to care more for things that used to be than things that are now, that one gets to prize these old friends so?

I am wandering away from Floss and Carrots waiting for nurse in the cottage garden; you must forgive me, boys and girls—when people begin to grow old they get in the habit of telling stories in a rambling way, but I don't find children so hard upon this tiresome habit as big people sometimes are. 'And it all

comes back to me so—even the old washerwoman’s cottage I can see so plainly, and the dear straggly little garden!

For you see, children, I am telling you the history of a *real* little boy and girl, not fancy children, and that is why, though there is nothing very wonderful about Floss and Carrots, I hope the story of their little pleasures and sorrows and simple lives may be interesting to you.

But I must finish about the visit to the washerwoman in another chapter. I have made this one rather too long already.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST HALF-SOVEREIGN

“Children should not leave about
Anything that’s small and bright;
Lest the fairies spy it out,
And fly off with it at night.”

POEMS WRITTEN FOR A CHILD.

THERE was no buzzy sound in Mrs. White’s garden this afternoon. It was far too early in the year for that, indeed it was beginning to feel quite chilly and cold, as the afternoons often do of fine days in early spring, and by the time Floss and Carrots had eaten their cake, and examined all the rose bushes to see if they could find any buds, and wished it were summer, so that there would be some strawberries hiding under the glossy green leaves, they began to wonder why nurse was so long—and to feel rather cold and tired of waiting.

“Just run to the door, Carrots, dear,” said Floss, “and peep in to see if nurse is coming.”

She did not like to go herself, for she knew that nurse and Mrs. White were fond of a comfortable talk together and might not like to be interrupted by her. But Carrots they would not mind.

Carrots set off obediently, but before he got to the door he met nurse coming out. She was followed by Mrs. White and both were talking rather earnestly.

"You'll let me know, if so be as you find it, Mrs. Hooper; you won't forget?"—Mrs. White was saying—Hooper was nurse's name—"for I feel quite uneasy—I do that, for you."

"I'll let you know, and thank you, Mrs. White," said nurse. "I'm glad I happened to bring some of my own money with me too, for I should have been sorry to put you to any inconvenience by my carelessness—though how I could have been so careless as to mislay it, I'm sure it's more than I can say."

"It is, indeed, and you so careful," said Mrs. White sympathisingly.

Just then nurse caught sight of Carrots.

"Come along, Master Carrots," she said, "I was just going to look for you. Wherever's Miss Floss? We must be quick; it's quite time we were home."

"I'll tell Floss," said Carrots, disappearing again down the path, and in another moment Floss and he ran back to nurse.

Though they had been very quick, nurse seemed to think they had been slow. She even scolded Floss a very little as if she had been kept waiting by her and Carrots, when she was in a hurry to go, and both Floss and Carrots felt that this was very hard when the fact was that they had been waiting for nurse till they were both tired and cold.

"It wasn't Floss's fault. Floss wanted *you* to come quick, and she sended me to see," said Carrots indignantly.

"Hold your tongue, Master Carrots," said nurse sharply.

Carrots' face got very red, he gave nurse one reproachful look, but did not speak. He took Floss's hand and pulled her on in front. But Floss would not go; she drew her hand away.

"No, Carrots, dear," she said in a low voice, "it wouldn't be kind to leave nurse all alone when she is sorry about something."

"Is she sorry about somesing?" said Carrots.

"Yes," replied Floss, "I am sure she is. You run on for a minute. I want to speak to nurse."

Carrots ran on and Floss stayed behind.

"Nurse," she said softly, slipping her hand through nurse's arm, which, by stretching up on tip-toe, she was just able to do, "nurse, dear, what's the matter?"

"Nothing much, Miss Flossie," replied nurse, patting the kind little hand, "nothing much, but I'm growing an old woman and easy put out—and such a stupid-like thing for me to have done!"

"What have you done? What is stupid?" inquired Floss, growing curious as well as sympathising.

"I have lost a half-sovereign—a ten-shilling piece in gold, Miss Flossie," replied nurse.

"Out of your pocket—dropped it, do you mean?" said Floss.

"Oh no—I had it in my purse—at least I thought I had," said nurse. "It was a half-sovereign of your mamma's that she gave me to pay Mrs. White with for Master Jack's things and part of last week that was left over, and I wrapped it up with a shilling and a sixpence—it came to eleven and six, altogether—in a piece of paper, and put it in my drawer in the nursery, and before I came out I put the packet in my purse. And when I opened it at Mrs. White's no half-sovereign was there! Only the shilling and the sixpence!"

"You didn't drop it at Mrs. White's, did you? Should we go back and look?" said Floss, standing still, as if ready to run off that moment.

"No, no, my dear. It's not at Mrs. White's. She and I searched all over, and she's as honest a body as could be," replied nurse. "No, there's just the chance of its being in the drawer at home. I feel all in a fever till I get there to look. But don't you say anything about it, Miss Flossie; it's my own fault, and no one must be troubled about it but myself."

“Poor nursie,” said Floss, “I’m so sorry. But you’re sure to find it in your drawer. Let’s go home very fast. Carrots,” she called out to the little figure obediently trotting on in front, “Carrots, come and walk with nursie and me now. Nurse isn’t vexed.”

Carrots turned back, looking up wistfully in nurse’s face.

“Poor darlings,” said the old woman to herself, “such a shame of me to have spoilt their walk!”

And all the way home, “to make up,” she was even kinder than usual.

But her hopes of finding the lost piece of money were disappointed. She searched all through the drawer in vain; there was no half-sovereign to be seen. Suddenly it struck her that Carrots had been busy “tidying” for Floss that morning.

“Master Carrots, my dear,” she said, “when you were busy at Miss Floss’s drawer to-day, you didn’t open mine, did you, and touch anything in it?”

“Oh, no,” said Carrots, at once, “I’m quite, quite *sure* I didn’t, nursie.”

“You’re sure you didn’t touch nurse’s purse, or a little tiny packet of white paper, in her drawer?” inquired Floss, with an instinct that the circumstantial details might possibly recall some forgotten remembrance to his mind.

“Quite sure,” said Carrots, looking straight up in their faces with a thoughtful, but not uncertain expression in his brown eyes.

“Because nurse has lost something out of her drawer, you see, Carrots dear, and she is very sorry about it,” continued Floss.

“What has she lost? But I’m *sure*,” repeated Carrots, “I didn’t touch nurse’s drawer, nor nucken in it. What has nurse lost?”

“A half-sovereign——” began Floss, but nurse interrupted her.

“Don’t tease him any more about it,” she said; “it’s plain

he doesn't know, and I wouldn't like the other servants to hear. Just forget about it, Master Carrots, my dear, perhaps nurse will find it some day."

So Carrots, literally obedient, asked no more questions. He only said to himself, with a puzzled look on his face, "A half-sovereign! I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns—I thought only Floss had—and I never saw any broken in halves!"

But as no more was said in his hearing about the matter, it passed from his innocent mind.

Nurse thought it right to tell the children's mother of her loss, and the girls and Maurice heard of it too. They all were very sorry for nurse, for she took her own carelessness rather sorely to heart. But by her wish, nothing was said of it to the two other servants, one of whom had only lately come, though the other had been with them many years.

"I'd rather by far bear the loss," said nurse, "than cause any ill-feeling about it, ma'am."

And her mistress gave in to her. "Though certainly *you* must not bear the loss, nurse," she said, kindly; "for in all these years you have saved me too many half-sovereigns and whole ones too for me to mind much about the loss of one. And you've asked Carrots, you say; you're sure he knows nothing about it?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," said nurse, unhesitatingly.

And several days went on, and nothing more was said or heard about the half-sovereign. Only all this time the little yellow sixpenny lay safely hidden away in Carrots' paint-box.

In a sense he had forgotten about it. He knew it was safe there, and he had almost fixed in his mind not to tell Floss about it till the day they should be going to the toy-shop to buy their hoops. Once or twice he had been on the point of showing it to her, but had stopped short, thinking how much more delightful it would be to "surprise" her. He had quite left off puzzling his head as to where the little coin had come from; he had found it in Floss's drawer, that was quite enough. If he had any

thoughts about its history, they were that either Floss had had “the sixpenny” a long time ago and had forgotten it, or that the fairies had brought it; and on the whole he inclined to the latter explanation, for you see there was something different about this sixpenny from any he had ever seen before.

Very likely “fairies’ sixpennies” are always that pretty yellow colour, he thought.

One day, about a week after the loss of the half-sovereign, Maurice happened to come into the nursery just at the little ones’ tea-time. It was a half-holiday, and he had been out a long walk with some of his companions, for he still went to school at Sandyshore, and now he had come in tremendously hungry and thirsty.

“I say, nurse,” he exclaimed, seating himself unceremoniously at the table, “I’m awfully hungry, and mamma’s out, and we shan’t have tea for two hours yet. And Carrots, young man, I want your paint-box; mine’s all gone to smash, and Cecil won’t lend me hers, and I want to paint flags with stars and stripes for my new boat.”

“Tars and tipes,” repeated Carrots, “what’s tars and tipes?”

“What’s that to you?” replied Mott, politely. “Bless me, I am so thirsty. Give me your tea, Carrots, and nurse will make you some more. What awful weak stuff! But I’m too thirsty to wait.”

He seized Carrots’ mug and drank off its contents at one draught. But when he put the mug down he made a *very* wry face.

“What horrible stuff!” he exclaimed. “Nurse, you’ve forgotten to put in any sugar.”

“No, she hasn’t,” said Carrots, bluntly.

Nurse smiled, but said nothing, and Floss looked fidgety.

“What do you mean?” said Mott. “Don’t you like sugar—eh, young ‘un?”

"Yes, I do like it," replied Carrots, but he would say no more.

Floss grew more and more uneasy.

"Oh, Mott," she burst out, "please don't tease Carrots. It's nothing wrong; it's only something we've planned ourselves."

Mott's curiosity was by this time thoroughly aroused.

"A secret, is it?" he exclaimed, pricking up his ears; "you'd best tell it me. I'm a duffer at keeping secrets. Out with it."

Floss looked ready to cry, and Carrots shut his mouth tight, as if determined not to give in. Nurse thought it time to interfere.

"Master Maurice," she said, appealingly, "don't tease the poor little things, there's a good boy. If it is a secret, there's no harm in it, you may be sure."

"Tease!" repeated Mott, virtuously, "I'm not teasing. I only want to know what the mystery is—why shouldn't I? I won't interfere."

Now Mott was just at the age when the spirit of mischief is most apt to get thorough hold of a boy; and once this is the case, who can say where or at what a boy will stop? Every opposition or contradiction only adds fuel to the flames, and not seldom a tiny spark may thus end in a great fire. Nurse knew something of boys in general, and of Mott in particular; and knowing what she did, she decided in her own mind that she had better take the bull by the horns without delay.

"Miss Floss," she said seriously, "and Master Carrots, I think you had better tell your brother your secret. He'll be very kind about it, you'll see, and he won't tell anybody."

"Won't you, Mott?" said Floss, jumping up and down on her chair in her anxiety. "Promise."

"Honour bright," said Mott.

Carrots opened his mouth as if about to speak, but shut it down again.

"What were *you* going to say?" said Mott.

"Nucken," replied Carrots.

"People don't open their mouths like that, if they've 'nucken' to say," said Mott, as if he didn't believe Carrots.

"I didn't mean that I wasn't *going* to say nucken," said Carrots, "I mean I haven't nucken to say now."

"And what were you going to say?" persisted Mott.

Carrots looked frightened.

"I was only sinking if you knowed, and nurse knowed, and Floss knowed, and I knowed, it wouldn't be a secret."

Mott burst out laughing.

"What a precious goose you are," he exclaimed. "Well, secret or no secret, I'm going to hear it; so tell me."

Floss looked at nurse despairingly.

"You tell, nurse, please," she said.

So nurse told, and Maurice looked more amused than ever. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe Carrots'll hold out for a month, whatever Floss may do, unless he has a precious lump of ac—ac—what is it the head people call it?—acquisitiveness for his age. But you needn't have made such a fuss about your precious secret. Here, nurse, give us some tea, and you may put in all the sugar Floss and Carrots have saved by now."

Floss and Carrots looked ready to cry, but nurse reassured them.

"Never you fear," she said; "he shall have what's proper, but no more. Never was such a boy for sweet things as you, Master Mott."

"It shows in my temper, doesn't it?" he said saucily. And then he was so pleased with his own wit that for a few minutes he forgot to tease, occupying himself by eating lots of bread and butter instead, so that tea went on peaceably.



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"So Floss and Carrots ate their bread and milk in undiminished curiosity."

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CHAPTER V

CARROTS IN TROUBLE

"But bitter while they flow, are childish tears."

"Now Carrots," said Mott, when he had eaten what he considered might possibly support him for the next two hours, "now Carrots, let's have the paint-box. You needn't disturb yourself," he continued, for Carrots was preparing to descend from his high chair, "I know where you keep it; it's in your drawer, isn't it? Which is his drawer, nurse? It'll be a good opportunity for me to see if he keeps it tidy."

"No, no, let me get it myself," cried Carrots, tumbling himself off his chair anyhow in his eagerness. "Nurse, nurse, don't tell him which is mine; don't let him take my paint-box, let me get it my own self."

Nurse looked at him with some surprise; it was seldom the little boy so excited himself.

"Master Mott won't hurt your drawer, my dear," she said; "you don't mind his having your paint-box, I'm sure. But do let him get it out himself, if he wants, Master Maurice, there's a dear boy," she continued, for Maurice was by this time ferreting in Floss's drawer with great gusto, and in another moment would have been at Carrots'! But Carrots was at it before him. He pulled it open as far as he could, for in consequence of Mott's investigations in the upper story, he could not easily penetrate to his own quarters. But he knew exactly where the paint-box lay, and managed to slip it out, without Maurice's noticing what he was doing. His triumph was short-lived, however; before he could open the box, Mott was after him.

"Hi, you young sneak!" he cried, "what are you after now? Give me the box; I believe you want to take the best paints out before you lend it to me," and he wrenched the paint-box out of his little brother's hands.

"I don't, I don't," sobbed Carrots, sitting down on the floor and crying bitterly; "you may have all the paints, Mott, but it's my secret, oh, my secret!"

"What are you talking about?" said Mott, roughly, pulling out the lid as he spoke. The box had been all tumbled about in the struggle, and the paints came rattling out, the paints and the brushes, and the little saucers, and with them came rolling down on to the floor, children, you know what—the "fairies' sixpenny," the little bright, shining, yellow half-sovereign!

A strange change came over Mott's face.

"Nurse," he cried, "do you see that? What does that mean?"

Nurse hastened up to where he was standing; she stared for a moment in puzzled astonishment at the spot on the carpet to which the toe of Maurice's boot was pointing, then she stooped down slowly and picked up the coin, still without speaking.

"Well, nurse," said Maurice, impatiently, "what do you think of that?"

"My half-sovereign," said nurse, as if hardly believing what she saw.

"Of course it's your half-sovereign," said Mott, "it's as plain as a pike-staff. But how did it come there, that's the question?"

Nurse looked at Carrots with puzzled perplexity. "He couldn't have known," she said in a low voice, too low for Carrots to hear. He was still sitting on the floor sobbing, and through his sobs was to be heard now and then the melancholy cry, "My secret, oh, my poor secret."

"You hear what he says," said Maurice; "what does his 'secret' mean but that he sneaked into your drawer and took the half-sovereign, and now doesn't like being found out. I'm ashamed to have him for my brother, that I am, the little cad!"

"But he couldn't have understood," said nurse, at a loss how otherwise to defend her little boy. "I'm not even sure he rightly

knew of my losing it, and he might have taken it, meaning no harm, not knowing what it was, indeed, very likely."

"Rubbish," said Maurice. "A child that is going without sugar to get money instead, must be old enough to understand something about what money is."

"But that was *my* plan; it wasn't Carrots that thought of it at all," said Floss, who all this time had stood by, frightened and distressed, not knowing what to say.

"Hold your tongue, Floss," said Maurice, roughly; and Floss subsided. "Carrots," he continued, turning to his brother, "leave off crying this minute, and listen to me. Who put this piece of money into your paint-box?"

"I did my own self," said Carrots.

"What for?"

"To keep it a secret for Floss," sobbed Carrots.

Maurice turned triumphantly to nurse.

"There," he said, "you see! And," he continued to Carrots again, "you took it out of nurse's drawer—out of a little paper packet?"

"No," said Carrots, "I didn't. I didn't know it was nurse's."

"You didn't know nurse had lost a half-sovereign?" exclaimed Mott, "Carrots, how dare you say so?"

"Yes," said Carrots, looking so puzzled, that for a moment or two he forgot to sob, "I did know; Floss told me."

"Then how can you say you didn't know this was nurse's?" said Mott.

"Oh, I don't know—I didn't know—I can't understand," cried Carrots, relapsing into fresh sobs.

"I wish your mamma were in, that I do," said nurse, looking ready to cry too; by this time Floss's tears were flowing freely.

"She isn't, so it's no good wishing she were," said Maurice; "but papa is," he went on importantly, "and I'll just take Carrots to him and see what he'll say to all this."

"Oh, no, Master Mott, don't do that, I beg and pray of you,"

said nurse, all but wringing her hands in entreaty. "Your papa doesn't understand about the little ones; do wait till your mamma comes in."

"No, indeed, nurse; it's a thing papa *should* be told," said Mott, in his innermost heart half inclined to yield, but working himself up to imagine he was acting very heroically. And notwithstanding nurse's distress, and Floss's tears, off he marched his unfortunate little brother to the study.

"Papa," he said, knocking at the door, "may I come in? There's something I must speak to you about immediately."

"Come in, then," was the reply. "Well, and what's the matter now? Has Carrots hurt himself?" asked his father, naturally enough for his red-haired little son looked pitiable in the extreme as he crept into the room after Maurice, frightened, bewildered, and, so far as his gentle disposition was capable of such a feeling, indignant also, all at once.

"No," replied Maurice, pushing Carrots forward, "he's not hurt himself; it's worse than that. Papa," he continued excitedly, "you whipped me once, when I was a little fellow, for telling a story. I am very sorry to trouble you, but I think it's right you should know; I am afraid you will have to punish Carrots more severely than you punished me, for he's done worse than tell a story." Maurice stopped to take breath, and looked at his father to see the effect of his words. Carrots had stopped crying to listen to what Maurice was saying, and there he stood, staring up with his large brown eyes, two or three tears still struggling down his cheeks, his face smeared and red and looking very miserable. Yet he did not seem to be in the least ashamed of himself, and this somehow provoked Mott and hardened him against his brother.

"What's he been doing?" said their father, looking at the two boys with more amusement than anxiety, and then glancing regretfully at the newspaper which he had been comfortably reading when Mott's knock came to the door.

"He's done much worse than tell a story," repeated Maurice, "though for that matter he's told two or three stories, too. But, papa, you know about nurse losing a half-sovereign? Well, *Carrots* had got it all the time; he took it out of nurse's purse, and hid it away in his paint-box, without telling anybody. He can't deny it, though he tried to."

"Carrots," said his father sternly, "is this true?"

Carrots looked up in his father's face; that face, generally so kind and merry, was now all gloom and displeasure—why?—Carrots could not understand, and he was too frightened and miserable to collect his little wits together to try to do so. He just gave a sort of little tremble and began to cry again.

"Carrots," repeated his father, "is this true?"

"I don't know," sobbed Carrots.

Now Captain Desart, Carrots' father, was, as I think I have told you, a sailor. If any of you children have a sailor for your father, you must not think I mean to teach you to be disrespectful when I say that sailors *are*, there is no doubt, inclined to be hot-tempered and hasty. And I do not think on the whole that they understand much about children, though they are often very fond of them and very kind. All this was the case with Carrots' father. He had been so much away from his children while they were little, that he really hardly knew how they had been brought up or trained or anything about their childish ways—he had left them entirely to his wife, and scarcely considered them as in any way "*his* business," till they were quite big boys and girls.

But once he did begin to notice them, though very kind, he was very strict. He had most decided opinions about the only way of checking their faults whenever these were serious enough to attract his attention, and he could not and would not be troubled with arguing, or what he called "splitting hairs," about such matters. A fault was a fault; telling a falsehood was telling a falsehood; and he made no allowance for the excuses or "palliat-

ing circumstances" there might be to consider. One child, according to his ideas, was to be treated exactly like another; why the same offence should deserve severer punishment with a self-willed, self-confident, bold, matter-of-fact lad, such as Maurice, than with a timid, fanciful, baby-like creature as was his little Fabian, he could not have understood had he tried.

Nurse knew all this by long experience; no wonder, kind though she knew her master to be, that she trembled when Mott announced his intention of laying the whole affair before his father.

But poor Carrots did not know anything about it. "Papa" had never been "cross" to him before, and he was far from clearly understanding why he was "cross" to him now. So he just sobbed and said "I don't know," which was about the worst thing he could possibly have said in his own defence, though literally the truth.

"No or yes, sir," said Captain Desart, his voice growing louder and sterner—I think he really forgot that it was a poor little shrimp of six years old he was speaking to—"no nonsense of 'don't knows.' Did you or did you not take nurse's half-sovereign out of her drawer and keep it for your own?"

"No," said Carrots, "I never took nucken out of nurse's drawer. I never did, papa, and I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns."

"Didn't you know nurse had *lost* a half-sovereign? Carrots, how can you say so?" interrupted Mott.

"Yes, Floss told me," said Carrots.

"And Floss hid it away in your paint-box, I suppose?" said Mott, sarcastically.

"No, Floss didn't. I hided the sixpenny my own self," said Carrots, looking more and more puzzled.

"Hold your tongue, Maurice," said his father, angrily. "Go and fetch the money and the tom-fool paint-box thing that you say he had it in."

Mott did as he was told. He ran to the nursery and back

as fast as he could; but, unobserved by him, Floss managed to run after him and crept into the study so quietly that her father never noticed her.

Maurice laid the old-paint-box and the half-sovereign down on the table in front of his father; Captain Desart held up the little coin between his finger and thumb.

"Now," he said, "Carrots, look at this. Did you or did you not take this piece of money out of nurse's drawer and hide it away in your paint-box?"

Carrots stared hard at the half-sovereign.

"I did put in in my paint-box," he said, and then he stopped.

"What for?" said his father.

"I wanted to keep it for a secret," he replied. "I wanted to—to—to—"

"*What?*" thundered Captain Desart.

"To buy something at the toy-shop with it," sobbed Carrots.

Captain Desart sat down and looked at Mott for sympathy.

"Upon my soul," he said, "one could hardly believe it. A child that one would think scarcely knew the value of money! Where can he have learnt such cunning; you say you are sure he was told of nurse's having lost a half-sovereign?"

"Oh, yes," said Mott; "he confesses to that much himself."

"Floss told me," said Carrots.

"Then how can you pretend you didn't take it out of her drawer, too," said his father.

"I don't know. I didn't take it out of her drawer; it was aside Floss's doll," said Carrots.

"He's trying to equivocate," said his father. Then he turned to the child again, looking more determined than ever.

"Carrots," he said, "I must whip you for this. Do you know that I am ashamed to think you are my son? If you were a poor boy you might be put in prison for this."

Carrots looked too bewildered to understand. "In prison," he repeated. "Would the prison-man take me?"

"What does he mean?" said Captain Desart.

Floss, who had been waiting unobserved in her corner all this time, thought this a good opportunity for coming forward.

"He means the policeman," she said. "Oh, papa," she went on, running up to her little brother and throwing her arms round him, the tears streaming down her face, "oh, papa, poor little Carrots! he *doesn't* understand."

"Where did *you* come from?" said her father, gruffly but not unkindly, for Floss was rather a favourite of his. "What do you mean about his not understanding? Did you know about this business, Floss?"

"Oh, no, papa," said Floss, her face flushing; "I'm too big not to understand."

"Of course you are," said Captain Desart; "and Carrots is big enough, too, to understand the very plain rule that he is not to touch what does not belong to him. He was told, too, that nurse had lost a half-sovereign, and he might then have owned to having taken it and given it back, and then things would not have looked so bad. Take him up to my dressing-room, Maurice, and leave him there till I come."

"May I go with him, papa?" said Floss very timidly.

"No," said her father, "you may not."

So Mott led off poor weeping Carrots, and all the way upstairs he kept sobbing to himself, "I never touched nurse's sovereigns. I never did. I didn't know she had any sovereigns."

"Hold your tongue," said Mott; "what is the use of telling more stories about it?"

"I didn't tell stories. I said I hided the sixpenny my own self, but I never touched nurse's sovereigns; I never did."

"I believe you're more than half an idiot," said Mott, angry and yet sorry—angry with himself, too, somehow.

Floss, left alone with her father, ventured on another appeal.

"You won't whip Carrots till mamma comes in, will you, papa?" she said softly.

"Why not? Do you think I want her to help me to whip him?" said Captain Desart.

"Oh no—but—I think perhaps mamma would understand better how it was, for, oh, papa, dear, Carrots *isn't* a naughty boy; he never, never tells stories."

"Well, we'll see," replied her father; "and in the meanwhile it will do him no harm to think things over by himself in my dressing-room for a little."

"Oh, poor Carrots!" murmured Floss to herself; "it'll be getting dark, and he's all alone. I *wish* mamma would come in!"

CHAPTER VI

CARROTS "ALL ZIGHT" AGAIN

"When next the summer breeze comes by,
And waves the bush, the flower is dry."

WALTER SCOTT.

Floss crept upstairs to the dressing-room door. It was locked. Though the key was in the lock, she knew she must not turn it; and even had it been open she would not have dared to go in, after her father's forbidding it. But she thought she might venture to speak to Carrots, to comfort him a little, through the door. She was dreadfully afraid that he might feel frightened in there alone if it got dark before he was released, for sometimes he *was* afraid of the dark—he was such a little boy, remember.

Floss tapped at the door.

"Carrots," she said, "are you there?"

"Yes," said Carrots; "but you can't come in, Floss. Mott has locked me in."

"I know," said Floss; "what are you doing, Carrots. Are you very unhappy?"

"Not so very. I'm crying—I'm crying a great lot, Floss, but I don't think I'm so very unhappy—not now you've come to the door."

"Poor Carrots," said Floss, "I'll stay by the door, if you like. I'll just run down to the front door now and then, to see if mamma is coming, and then I'll come straight back to you."

"All zight," said Carrots. Whenever he wanted to seem very brave, and rather a big boy, he used to say "all zight," and just now he was trying very hard to be like a big boy.

There was silence for a minute or two. Then Carrots called out again.

"Floss," he said, "are you there?"

"Yes, dear," replied faithful Floss.

"I want just to tell you one thing," he said. "Floss, I never did touch nurse's sovereigns. I never knowed she had any."

"It wasn't a sovereign; it was a *half*-sovereign," corrected Floss.

"I don't under'tand how it *could* be a half-sovereign," said Carrots. "But I never touched nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it."

"Then where did you find the half-sovereign?" began Floss, "and why—oh, Carrots," she broke off, "I do believe that's the front door bell. It'll be mamma coming. I must run down."

"All zight," called out Carrots again. "Don't be long, Floss; but please tell mamma all about it. I *don't* under'tand."

He gave a little sigh of perplexity and lay down on the floor near the window where the room was lightest, for the darkness was now beginning to creep in and he felt very lonely.

Poor Mrs. Desart hardly knew what to think or say, when, almost before she had got into the house, she was seized upon by Maurice and Floss, each eager to tell their own story. *Carrots* naughty, *Carrots* in disgrace, was such an extraordinary idea!

"Nurse," she exclaimed, perceiving her at the end of the passage, whence she had been watching as anxiously as the

children for her mistress's return, "nurse, what is the meaning of it all?"

"Indeed, ma'am," nurse was beginning, but she was interrupted. "Come in here, Lucy," said Captain Desart to his wife, opening the study door, "come in here before you go upstairs."

And Mrs. Desart did as he asked, but Floss again managed to creep in too, almost hidden in the folds of her mother's dress.

"I can't believe that Carrots is greedy, or cunning, or obstinate," said his mother, when she heard all. "I cannot think that he understood what he was doing when he took the half-sovereign."

"But the hiding it," said Captain Desart, "the hiding it, and yet to my face persisting that he had never touched nurse's half-sovereign. I can't make the child out."

"He says he didn't know nurse had any sovereigns," put in Floss.

"Are you there again, you ubiquitous child?" said her father.

Floss looked rather frightened—such a long word as ubiquitous must surely mean something very naughty; but her father's voice was not angry, so she took courage.

"Does he know what a sovereign means?" said Mrs. Desart. "Perhaps there is some confusion in his mind which makes him seem obstinate when he isn't so really."

"He said he knew I had sovereigns," said Floss, "and I couldn't think what he meant. Oh, mamma," she went on suddenly, "I do believe I know what he was thinking of. It was my kings and queens."

And before her father or mother could stop her, she had darted off to the nursery. In two minutes she was back again, holding out to her mother a round wooden box—the sort of box one often used to see with picture alphabets for little children, but instead of an alphabet, Floss's box contained a set of round card, each about the size of the top of a wine-glass, with the

heads of all the English kings and queens, from William the Conqueror down to Victoria!

“‘Sovereigns of England,’ mamma, you see,” she exclaimed, pointing to the words on the lid, and quite out of breath with hurry and excitement, “and I very often call them my sovereigns; and of course Carrots didn’t understand how there could be a *half* one of them, nor how nurse could have any.”

“It must be so,” said Mrs. Desart to her husband; “the poor child really did *not* understand.”

“But still the taking the money at all, and hiding it?” said Captain Desart. “I don’t see that it would be right not to punish him.”

“He has been punished already—pretty severely for him, I fancy,” said Floss’s mother, with a rather sad smile. “You will leave him to me now, won’t you, Frank?” she asked her husband. “I will go up and see him, and try to make him thoroughly understand. Give me the sovereigns, Floss dear, I’ll take them with me.”

Somewhat slowly, Carrots’ mother made her way upstairs. She was tired and rather troubled. She did not believe that her poor little boy had really done wrong wilfully, but it seemed difficult to manage well among so many children; she was grieved, also, at Maurice’s hastiness and want of tender feeling, and she saw, too, how little fitted Carrots was to make his way in this rough-and-ready world.

“How would it be without me! My poor children,” she thought with a sigh.

But a little hand was slipped into hers.

“Mamma, dear, I’m *so* glad you thought of the sovereigns. I’m *sure* Carrots didn’t mean to be naughty. Mamma dear, though he *is* so little, Carrots always means to be good; I don’t think he could even be frightened into doing anything that he understood was naughty, though he is so easily frightened other ways.”

“My good little Floss, my comforter,” said her mother, pat-

ting Floss's hand, and then they together made their way to the dressing-room.

It was almost dark. The key was in the lock, and Mrs. Desart felt for it and turned it. But when she opened the door it was too dark in the room to distinguish anything.

"Carrots," she said, but there was no answer. "Where can he be?" she said rather anxiously. "Floss, run and get a light."

Floss ran off: she was back again in a minute, for she had met nurse on the stairs with a candle in her hand. But even with the light they could not all at once find Carrots, and though they called to him there was no answer.

"Can he have got out of the window?" Mrs. Desart was beginning to say, when Floss interrupted her.

"Here he is, mamma," she exclaimed. "Oh, poor little Carrots! Mamma, nursie, do look."

There he was indeed—fast, fast asleep! Extra fast sleep, for his troubles and his tears had worn him out. He was lying in a corner of a large closet opening out of the dressing-room. In this closet Captain Desart hung up his coats and dressing-gowns, and doubtless Carrots had crept into it when the room began to get dark, feeling as if in the hanging garments there was some comfort and protection; and there he lay, looking so fair and innocent, prettier than when he was awake, for his cheeks had more colour, and his long eyelashes, reddy-brown like his hair, showed clearly on his fair skin.

"Poor little fellow, how sweet he looks," said Mrs. Desart. "Nurse, lift him up and try to put him to bed without waking him. We must wait to disentangle the confusion in his mind till to-morrow morning."

And very tenderly nurse lifted him up and carried him off.

"My bonnie wee man," she murmured; for though it was many and many a day since she had seen her native land, and she had journeyed with her master and mistress to strange countries

“far over the sea,” she was apt when her feelings were stirred to fall back into her own childish tongue.

So no more was said to or about Carrots that evening; but Floss went to bed quite happy and satisfied that “mamma” would put it all right in the morning. I don’t think Mott went to bed in so comfortable a mood; yet his mother had said nothing to him!

Cecil and Louise had, though. Cecil told him right out that he was a horrid telltale, and Louise said she only wished *he* had red hair instead of Carrots; which expressions of feeling on the part of such very grown-up young ladies meant a good deal, for it was not often they troubled themselves much about nursery matters. Cecil, that is to say, for Louise, who was fair-haired and soft and gentle, and played very nicely on the piano, was just a shadow of Cecil, and if Cecil had proposed that they should stay in bed all day and get up all night, would have thought it a very good idea!

And the next morning Mrs. Desart had a long talk with Carrots. It was all explained and made clear, and the difference between the two kinds of “sovereigns” shown to him. And he told his mother all—all, that is to say, except the “plan” for saving sugar and getting money instead, which had first put it into his head to keep the half-sovereign to get a new doll for Floss. He began to tell about the plan, but stopped when he remembered that it was Floss’s secret as well as his own; and when he told his mother this, she said he was quite right not to tell without Floss’s leave. and that as nurse knew about it, they might still keep it for their secret, if they liked, which Carrots was very glad to hear.

He told his mother about his thinking perhaps the fairies had brought the “sixpenny,” and she explained to him that now-a-days, alas! that was hardly likely to be the case, though she seemed quite to understand his fancying it, and did not laugh at him at all. But she spoke very gravely to him, too, about *never*

taking anything that was not his; and, after listening and thinking with all his might, Carrots said he thought he "kite under'tood."

"I am never, never to taken nucken that I'm not sure is mine," he said slowly. "And if ever I'm not sure I'm to ask somebody, you, or nursie, or Floss—or *sometimes*, perhaps, Cecil. But I don't think I'd better ask Mott, for perhaps he wouldn't under'tood."

But Mott's mother took care that before the day was over Mott *should* "under'tand" something of where and how he had been in fault; that there are sometimes ways of doing right which turn it into "wrong"; and that want of pity and tenderness for the wrong-*doer* never, never can be right.

CHAPTER VII

A LONG AGO STORY

"You may laugh, my little people,
But be sure my story's true;
For I vow by yon church steeple,
I was once a child like you."

THE LAND OF LONG AGO.

IF any of you children have travelled much, have you noticed that on a long journey there seem to come points, turns—I hardly know what to call them—after which the journey seems to go on differently. More quickly, perhaps more cheerfully, or possibly less *so*, but certainly *differently*. Looking back afterwards you see it was so—"from the time we all looked out of the window at the ruined abbey we seemed to get on so much faster," you would say, or—"after the steamer had passed the Spearhead Point, we began to feel dull and tired, and there was no more sunshine."

I think it is so in life. Suddenly, often quite unknowingly,

we turn a corner sometimes of our history, sometimes of our characters, and looking back, long afterwards, we make a date of that point. It was so just now with my little Carrots. This trouble of his about the half-sovereign changed him. I do not mean to say that it saddened him and made him less happy than he had been—at his age, thank God, few, if any children have it in them to be so deeply affected—but it *changed* him. It was his first peep out into life, and it gave him his first real *thoughts* about things. It made him see how a little wrong doing may cause great sorrow; it gave him his first vague, misty glimpse of that, to my thinking, saddest of all sad things—the way in which it is possible for our very nearest and dearest to mistake and mis-understand us.

He had been in some ways a good deal of a baby for his age, there is no doubt. He had a queer, babylike way of not seeming to take in quickly what was said to him, and staring up in your face with his great oxen-like eyes, that did a little excuse Maurice's way of laughing at him and telling him he was "half-witted." But no one that really looked at those honest, sensible, tender eyes could for an instant have thought there was any "want" in their owner. It was all *there*—the root of all goodness, cleverness, and manliness—just as in the acorn there is the oak; but of course it had a great deal of *growing* before it, and, more than mere growing, it would need all the care and watchful tenderness and wise directing that could be given it, just as the acorn needs all the rain and sunshine and good nourishing soil it can get, to become a fine oak, straight and strong and beautiful. For what do I mean by "it," children? I mean the "own self" of Carrots, the wonderful "something" in the little childish frame which the wisest of all the wise men of either long ago or now-a-days have never yet been able to describe—the "soul," children, which is in you all, which may grow into so beautiful, so lovely and perfect a thing; which may, alas! be twisted and stunted and starved out of all likeness to the "image" in which it was created.

Do you understand a little why it seems sometimes such a very, very solemn thing to have the charge of children? When one thinks what they *should* be, and again when one thinks what they *may* be, is it not a solemn, almost too solemn a thought? Only we, who feel this so deeply, take heart when we remember that the Great Gardener who never makes mistakes has promised to help us; even out of *our* mistakes to bring good.

As I have said the affair of the lost half-sovereign did not leave any lastingly painful impression on Carrots, but for some days he seemed unusually quiet and pale and a little sad. He had caught cold, too, with falling asleep on the dressing-room floor, nurse said, for the weather was still exceedingly chilly, though the spring was coming on. So altogether he was rather a miserable looking little Carrots.

He kept out of the way and did not complain, but "mamma" and nurse and Floss did not need complaints to make them see that their little man was not quite himself, and they were extra kind to him.

There came just then some very dull rainy days, regular rainy days, not stormy, but to the children much more disagreeable than had they been so. For in *stormy* weather at the seaside there is too much excitement for any one to think whether it is disagreeable or not—there is the splendid sight of the angry, troubled sea, there are the wonderful "storm songs" of the wind to listen to. Of course, as Carrots used to say, at such times it is "dedful" to think of the poor sailors; but even in thinking of them there is something that takes one's thoughts quite away from one's self, and one's own worries and troubles—all the marvellous stories of shipwreck and adventure, from Grace Darling to old Sinbad, come rushing into one's mind, and one feels as if the sea were the only part of the world worth living on.

But even at the seaside, regular, steady, "stupid" rainy days are trying. Carrots sat at the nursery window one of these dull afternoons looking out wistfully.

“Floss,” he said, for Floss was sitting on the floor learning her geography for the next day, “Floss, it *is* so raining.”

“I know,” said Floss, stopping a minute in her “principal rivers of northern Europe.” “I wish there wasn’t so much rain, and then there wouldn’t be so many rivers; or perhaps if there weren’t so many rivers there wouldn’t be so much rain. I wonder which it is!”

“Which began first—rivers or rain?” said Carrots, meditatively, “*that* would tell.”

“I’m sure I don’t know, and I don’t believe anybody does,” said Floss, going on again with her lesson. “Be quiet, Carrots, for one minute, and then I’ll talk to you.”

Carrots sat silent for about a minute and a half; then he began again.

“Floss,” he said.

“Well,” replied Floss. “I’ve very nearly done, Carrots.”

“It’s werry dull to-day, Floss; the sea looks dull too, it isn’t dancey a bit to-day, and the sands look as if they would *never* be nice for running on again.”

“Oh, but they will, Master Carrots,” said nurse, who was sitting near, busy darning stockings. “Dear, dear! don’t I remember feeling just so when I was a child? In winter thinking summer would never come, and in summer forgetting all about winter!”

“Is it a werry long time since you were a child?” inquired Carrots, directing his attention to nurse.

“It’s getting on for a good long time, my dear,” said nurse, with a smile.

“Please tell me about it,” said Carrots.

“Oh yes, nursie dear, do,” said Floss, jumping up from the floor and shutting her book. “I’ve done all my lessons, and it would just be nice to have a story. It would amuse poor little Carrots.”

“But you know all my stories as well, or even better, than

I do myself," objected nurse, "not that they were ever much to tell, any of them."

"Oh yes, they were. They are very nice stories indeed," said Floss, encouragingly. "And I'm very fond of what you call your mother's stories, too—aren't you, Carrots?—about the children she was nurse to—Master Hugh and Miss Janet. Tell us more about them, nursie."

"You've heard all the stories about them, my dears, I'm afraid," said nurse. "At least, I can't just now think of any worth telling but what you've heard."

"Well, let's hear some not worth the telling," said Floss, persistently. "Nurse," she went on, "how old must Master Hugh and Miss Janet be by now? Do you know where they are?"

"Master Hugh is dead," said nurse, "many a year ago, poor fellow, and little Miss Janet—why she was fifteen years older than I; mother only left them to be married when Miss Janet was past twelve. She must be quite an old lady by now, if she is alive—with grandchildren as old as you, perhaps! How strange it seems!"

"She must have been a very nice little girl, and so must Master Hugh have been—a nice little boy, I mean. That story of 'Mary Ann Jolly' was so interesting. I suppose they *never* did anything naughty?" said Floss, insinuatingly.

"Oh, but they did." replied nurse, quite unsuspecting of the trap laid for her. "Master Hugh was very mischievous. Did I never tell you what they did to their dog Cæsar?"

"No, never," said both the children in a breath; "do tell us."

"Well, it was one Sunday morning, to tell it as mother told me," began nurse. "You know, my dears," she broke off again, "it was in Scotland, and rather an out-of-the-way part where they lived. I know the place well, of course, for it wasn't till I was seventeen past that I ever left it. It is a pretty place, out of the way even now, I'm told, with railways and all, and in those days it was even more out-of-the-way. Six miles from the church,

and the prayers and the sermon very long when you got there! Many and many a time *I've* fallen asleep at church, when I was a little girl. Well, to go back to Master Hugh and Miss Janet. It was on a Sunday morning they did the queer piece of mischief I'm going to tell you of. They had been left at home with no one but an old woman, who was too deaf to go to church, to look after them. She lived in the lodge close by, and used to come into the house to help when the servants were busy, for she was a very trusty old body. It was not often the children were left without mother, or perhaps one of the housemaids, to take care of them, and very often in fine weather they used to be taken to church themselves, though it was tiring like for such young things. But this Sunday, everybody had gone to church because it was the time of the preaching——”

“The *what*, nurse?” said Floss. “Isn't there preaching every Sunday at church?”

“Oh yes, my dear; but what we call the preachings in Scotland means the time when there is the communion service, which is only twice a year. You can't understand, my dear,” seeing that Floss looked as mystified as ever; “but never mind. When you are older, you will find that there are many different ways of saying and doing the same things in churches, just like among people. But this Sunday I am telling you of, the services were to be very long indeed, too long for the children, considering the six miles' drive and all. So they were left at home with old Phemie.”

“Did they mind?” said Carrots.

“Oh no; I fancy they were very well pleased. They were always very happy together, the two of them and Caesar.”

“And of course they promised to be very good,” said Floss.

“No doubt of that,” said nurse, with a smile. “Well, they certainly hit upon a queer way of amusing themselves. Mother came home from church one of the earliest; she had a lift in one of the farmer's carts, and came in at the lodge gate just as

the carriage with her master and mistress and the young ladies was driving up. They all got out at the big gate, and let the coachman drive round to the stable the back way, and mother came quietly walking up the drive behind them. They were talking seriously about the sermon they had heard, and feeling rather solemn-like, I dare say, when all at once there flew down the drive to meet them the most fearsome-like creature that ever was seen. It was like nothing in nature, my mother said, about the size of a large wolf, but with a queer-shaped head and body—at least they looked queer to them, not knowing what it was—and not a particle of hair or coat of any kind upon it. It rushed up to my lady, that was Miss Janet's mother, and tried to leap upon her; but she shrieked to her husband, and he up with his stick—he always took a stick about with him—and was just on the point of giving it a fearful blow, never thinking but what it was one of the beasts escaped from some travelling show, when one of the young ladies caught his arm.

"'Stop father!' she cried. 'Don't you see who it is? It's *Caesar*.'

"'Caesar!' said he. 'My dear, *that's* never Cæsar.'

"But Cæsar it was, as they soon saw by the way he jumped and whined, and seemed to beg them to understand he was himself. He was frightened out of his wits, poor doggie, for he had never felt so queer before, and couldn't understand what had come over him."

"And what *had* come over him?" asked the children eagerly.

"Why, Master Hugh and Miss Janet had spent the morning in cropping him!" replied nurse. "The hair, and he had great long thick hair, was cut off as close and as neat as if it had been shaved; it was really wonderful how clean they had done it without cutting or wounding the poor doggie. They had taken great pains about it, and had spent the best part of the morning over it—the two of them, Master Hugie with the great kitchen scissors, and Miss Janet with a wee fine pair she had found in her mamma's

workbox, the little monkey! And such a sight as the kitchen dresser was with hair! For they told how they had made Cæsar jump up on to the dresser and lie first on one side and then on the other, till all was cut off."

"Were they punished?" asked Floss, anxiously. And at this question Carrots looked very woe-begone.

"They were *going* to be," said nurse, "but somehow, I cannot justly say how it was, they were let off. The whole thing was such a queer idea, their father and mother could not but laugh at it, though they didn't let the children see them. And what do you think my lady did? She took all poor Cæsar's hair and spun it up into worsted for knitting, mixing it, of course, with long yarn."

"Did *she* spin?" asked Floss. "I thought you said she was a lady."

"And that she was, Miss Flossie, and none the less so for being able to spin and to knit, and to cook too, I dare say," said nurse. "But ladies, and high born ones too, in those days turned their hands to many things they think beneath them now. I know Miss Janet's mother would never have thought of letting any one but herself wash up her breakfast and tea services. The cups were a sight to be seen, certainly, of such beautiful old china; they were worth taking care of; and that's how old china has been kept together. There isn't much of what's in use now-a-days will go down to your grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, Miss Flossie, with the smashing and dashing that goes on. My lady had a white wood bowl kept on purpose, and the napkin of the finest damask, and a large apron of fine holland that she put on, and, oh yes, a pair of embroidered holland cuffs she used to draw on over her sleeves up to the elbow; and a lady she looked, I can assure you, rinsing out and drying her beautiful cups, with her pretty white hands!"

"Did you ever see her?" asked Floss.

"Yes, when she was getting to be quite an old lady, I've

see her several times when I've been sent upon a message by mother to the house. For my mother was a great favourite of hers; I never went there but my lady would have me in to have a piece."

"A piece?" repeated Floss.

Nurse laughed. "A slice of bread and jam, I should say, my dear. I forget that I'm far away from the old life when I get to talking of those days. And to think I'm getting on to be quite an old woman myself; older in some ways than my lady ever was, for my hair is fast turning gray, and hers had never a silver streak in it to the last day of her life, and she died at eighty-four!"

Carrots was getting a little tired, for he hardly understood all that nurse was saying. To create a diversion he climbed up on to her knee, and began stroking her face.

"Never mind, nursie," he said. "I'll always love you, even when your hair's *kite* gray, and I would marry you if you like when I'm big, only I've promised to marry Floss."

"Oh you funny little Carrots," said Floss. "But nurse," she went on, "what did Janet's mamma do with the hair when she had spun it?"

"She knitted it into a pair of stockings for Master Hughie," said nurse; "but they weren't much use. They were well enough to look at, but no mortal boy could have worn them without his legs being skinned, they *were* so prickly."

"And what became of Cæsar?" said Floss. "Did his hair ever grow again?"

"Oh yes," said nurse, "in time it did, though I believe it never again looked quite so silky and nice. But Cæsar lived to a good old age, for all that. He didn't catch cold, for my lady made mother make him a coat of a bit of soft warm cloth, which he wore for some time."

"How funny he must have looked," said Floss.

"What are you talking about?" said a voice behind her, and

turning round, Floss saw Cecil, who had come into the room without their hearing her.

"About a doggie," answered Carrots. "Oh, Cis, nurse has been telling us such a lubly story about a doggie. Nursie, dear, won't you tell us another to-morrow?"

"My stories are all worn out, my dear," said nurse, shaking her head.

"Couldn't *you* tell us one, Cis?" said Carrots.

"Make up one, do you mean?" said Cecil. "No, indeed, I'm sure I never could. Are they always at you to tell them stories, nurse? If so, I pity you."

"Poor little things," said nurse, "it's dull for them these wet days, Miss Cecil, and Master Carrots' cold has been bad."

Cecil looked at her little brother's pale face as he sat nestling in nurse's arms, and a queer new feeling of compunction seized her.

"I couldn't *tell* you a story," she said; "but if you like, the first afternoon it's rainy, and you can't go out, I'll *read* you one. Miss Barclay lent me a funny old-fashioned little book the other day, and some of the stories in it are fairy ones. Would you like that, Carrots?"

Floss clapped her hands, and Carrots slid down from nurse's knee, and coming quietly up to Cecil, threw his arms round her neck, and gave her a kiss.

"I hope it'll rain to-morrow," he said, gravely.

"It *is* kind of Miss Cecil," said nurse; and as Cecil left the nursery she added to herself, "it will be a comfort to her mother if she begins to take thought for the little ones, and I've always felt sure it was in her to do so, if only she could get into the way of it."

CHAPTER VIII

"THE BEWITCHED TONGUE."

"Thou wilt not fail
To listen to a fairy tale."

LEWIS CARROLL.

IT *did* rain the next day! And Cecil did not forget her promise. Just as the old nursery clock was striking four, a full hour still to her tea-time, she marched into the room with a little old brown book in her hand. I wonder if any of you have ever seen that little old book, or one like it, I should say? It was about the size of the first edition of "Evenings at Home," which some of you are sure to have in your book-cases. For I should think *everybody's* grandfathers and grandmothers had an "Evening's at Home" among their few, dearly-prized children's books.

Do you know how very few those books were? You may have heard it, but I scarcely fancy you have ever thought over the great difference between yourselves and long-ago-children in this respect. Now-a-days, when you have galloped through all the brilliant blue and green and scarlet little volumes that have been given to you on birthdays and Christmas-days, you come with a melancholy face to your mother, and tell her you have "nothing to read." And then, most likely, when your mother goes to the library, she chooses a book for you out of the "juvenile department," and when it is done you get another, till you can hardly remember what you have read and what you haven't. But as for reading any book twice over, *that* is never to be thought of.

Not so was it long ago. Not only had no children many books, but everywhere children had the same. There was seldom any use in little friends lending to each other, for it was always the same thing over again: "Evenings at Home," "Sandford and Merton," "Ornaments Discovered," and so on.

You think, I dare say, that it must have been very stupid

and tiresome to have so little variety, but *I* think you are in some ways mistaken. Children really *read* their books in those days; they put more of themselves into their reading, so that, stupid as these quaint old stories might seem to you now-a-days, they never seemed so then. What was wanting in them the children filled up out of their own fresh hearts and fancies, and however often they read and re-read them, they always found something new. They got to know the characters in their favourite stories like real friends, and would talk them over with their companions, and compare their opinions about them in a way that made each book as good, or better, than a dozen.

So there is something to be said for this part of the "*ancien régime*"—if you do not understand what that means, you will some day—after all!

The volume that Cecil Desart brought into the nursery was called "Faults Corrected; or" (there was always long ago an "or" in the titles of books) "Beneficent Influences."

"Some of the stories are stupid," said Cecil, as she sat down. "Miss Barclay said it was her mother's when she was a little girl, so it must be rather ancient; but I think I've found one that will amuse you, and that Carrots can understand."

"What's it called?" said Floss, peering over her sister's shoulder. "'Faults Corrected; or, Ben—ben——' what word's that, Cecil?"

"Sit *down*, Floss, and be quiet, or I won't read to you," said Cecil emphatically. "That's the name of the whole book you are looking at, and you wouldn't understand the word if I told it you. The name of the story I'm going to read to you is, 'The Bewitched Tongue; or, Think Before You Speak.' A Fairy Tale."

Floss would have liked to clap her hands, but she was afraid of another snub from Cecil, so she restrained her feelings.

"When there come very long words," continued Cecil—"there often are in old books—I'll change them to easy ones,

so that Carrots may understand. Now, be quiet all of you, I'm going to begin. 'The Bewitched Tongue, etc.' I'm not going to read all the title again. 'In a beautiful mansion' (that just means a fine house, Carrots) 'surrounded by pleasure grounds of great extent, there lived, many years ago, a young girl named Elizabetha. She was of charming appearance and pleasing manners; her parents loved her devotedly, her brothers and sisters looked upon her with amiable affection, her teachers found her docile and intelligent. Yet Elizabetha constantly found herself, despite their affection, shunned and feared by her best and nearest friends, and absolutely disliked by those who did not know her well enough to feel assured of the real goodness of her heart.

"This sad state of things was all owing to one unfortunate habit. She had a hasty tongue. Whatever thought was uppermost in her mind at the moment, she expressed without reflection; she never remembered the wholesome adage. "Think before you speak," or that other excellent saying, "Second thoughts are best."

'Her disposition was far from unamiable or malicious, yet the mischief of which she was the cause was indescribable. Every servant in the household dreaded to hear the sound of her voice, for many had she involved in trouble and disgrace; and as her temper was naturally quick and impetuous, and she never attempted to check her first expressions of provocation, small and even trifling disagreements were by her foolish tongue exaggerated into lasting discord, long after all real cause of offence had passed from her mind.

"My brother will not forgive me," she confessed one day to her mother, with many tears, "and the quarrel was only that he had broken the vase of flowers that stand on my table. I forgave *him*—I would rather lose twenty vases than his affection—and yet he will not speak to me, and passes me by with indignant looks."

“And did you at once express your forgiveness to him, Elizabetha?” said her mother. “When you first discovered the accident, what words escaped you?”

Elizabetha reflected, and presently her colour rose.

“I fear, ma’am,” she said, “I fear that at the first sight of the broken vase I spoke unguardedly. I exclaimed that without doubt Adolphus had thrown down the ornament on purpose to annoy me, and that I wished so mean-spirited a youth were not my brother. My little sister Celia was beside me at the time—can she have carried to him what I said? I did not really mean that; my words were but the momentary expression of my vexation.”

Her mother gravely shook her head.

“It is your own doing altogether, Elizabetha,” she said, “and you cannot complain that your brother resents so unkind and untrue a charge.”

Elizabeth burst into tears, but the harm was done, and it was some time before Adolphus could forget the pain of her unjust and hasty words.

Another day her little brother Jacky had just with great pains and care written out his task for the next morning, when, having been called to supper, he found on his return to the schoolroom his exercise book all blotted and disfigured.

“Who can have done this?” he cried in distress.

Elizabetha was just entering the room.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “it is Sukey, the under-housemaid, that you have to thank for that. I saw her coming out of the room, and she had no reason to enter it. Out of curiosity she has been looking at your books, and blotted your exercise.”

Jacky was but eight years old, full young for prudence or reflection. Downstairs he flies, his face inflamed with anger, and meeting the unfortunate Sukey at the door of the servants’ hall, upbraids her in no gentle terms for her impertinence. In vain the poor girl defends herself, and denies Master Jacky’s

accusation; the other servants come to the rescue, and the whole household is in an uproar, till suddenly Miss Elizabetha is named as the source of the mischief.

"Ah," says the old housekeeper, "do not distress yourself, Sukey; we all know what Miss Elizabetha's tongue is!"

And thereupon the poor girl is freed from blame. She had only gone to the schoolroom by the desire of an upper servant to mend the fire, and the real offender was discovered to have been the cat!

This affair coming to the ears of Elizabetha's father, he reproved her with great severity. Mortified and chagrined, she, as usual, wept bitterly, and ashamed to meet the cold looks of the household, she hastened out into the garden and paced up and down a shady walk, where she imagined herself quite hidden from observation."

"Cis," interrupted Carrots at this point, "I don't understand the story."

"I'm very sorry," said Cecil, "I didn't notice what a lot of long words there are. Shall I leave off?"

"I understand it," said Floss.

"Then read it for Floss, please, Cis," said Carrots. "I'll be kite still."

"You're a good little boy," said Cecil; "I suppose I may as well finish it as I have begun. We're coming to the fairy part now. Perhaps you'll understand it better. Where was I? Oh yes, 'imagined herself quite hidden from observation. But in this she was mistaken, as my readers will see.'

"She walked slowly up and down. "Oh my tongue, my cruel tognue!" she exclaimed. "What trouble it is the cause of! How can I cure myself of my rash speech?"

"Do you in all sincerity wish to cure yourself, Elizabetha?" said a voice beside her; and turning in surprise at its sound, the young girl perceived at a few steps' distance a fair and sweet looking lady clad in silvery white, adorned with wreaths of the loveliest flowers.

“Assuredly I do, gracious lady,” replied Elizabetha, mastering as well as she was able her surprise, for she felt that this beautiful lady must be a fairy of high degree.

“Then *I* will help you,” said the lady, “but on one condition, hereafter to be explained. You are content to agree to this beforehand?”

“To *anything*, kind fairy,” replied the young girl, “if only my unhappy fault can be cured.”

The fairy smiled. “Hasty as ever,” she murmured; “however, in *this* instance, you shall have no reason to regret your words. Put out your tongue, Elizabetha.”

Trembling slightly, the young girl obeyed. But her fears were uncalled for—the fairy merely touched the unruly member with her wand and whispered some words, the meaning of which Elizabetha could not understand.

“Meet me here one week hence,” said the fairy, “till then your tongue will obey *my* commands. And if you then feel you have reason to feel grateful to me, I will call upon you to redeem your promise.”

‘And before Elizabetha could reply, the lady had disappeared.

Full of eagerness and curiosity, Elizabetha returned to the house. It was growing dusk, and as she sped along the garden paths something ran suddenly against her, causing her to trip and fall. As she got up she perceived that it was Fido, the dog of her brother Adolphus. The creature came bounding up to her again, full of play and affection. But in her fall Elizabetha had bruised herself; she felt angry and indignant.

“Get off with you, you clumsy wretch,” she exclaimed, or meant to exclaim. But to her amazement the words that issued from her mouth were quite otherwise.

“Gently, gently, my poor Fido. Thou didst not mean to knock me down, however,” she said in a kind and caressing tone, which the dog at once obeyed.

'Hardly knowing whether she were awake or dreaming, Elizabetha entered the house. She was met by her sister Maria.

"Where have you been, Elizabetha?" she inquired. "Your friends the Misses Larkyn have been here, but no one could find you, so they have gone."

Elizabetha felt extremely annoyed. She had not seen her friends for some weeks, and had much wished for a visit from them.

"I think it was most ill-natured of none of you to look for me in the garden. You might have known I was there if you had cared to oblige me," were the words she intended to say, but instead of which were heard the following:

"I thank you, my dear Maria. I am sorry to have missed my friends, but it cannot be helped."

'And when Maria, pleased by her gentleness, went on to tell her that, knowing that her disappointment would be great, and as the Misses Larkyn had been too pressed for time to linger, she had arranged to walk with Elizabetha the following day to see them, how rejoiced was Elizabetha that her intended words of unkindness had not been uttered! "Kind fairy, I thank thee!" she whispered to herself.

The following day the same state of things continued. Many times before its close did Elizabetha's hasty temper endeavour to express itself in rash speech, but each time the tongue remained faithful to its new mistress. Whenever Elizabetha attempted to speak hastily, the words that issued from her lips were exactly the opposite of those she had intended to utter; and as her real disposition was amiable and good, not once did she regret the metamorphosis.

'Her parents, her brothers and sisters, and even the servants of the family, were amazed and delighted at the change.

"Go on as thou hast begun, my child," said her father, on the morning of the day on which Elizabetha was again to

meet the fairy, "and soon the name of Elizabetha will be associated with gentleness and discretion in speech as in deed."

Elizabetha blushed. She would have liked to confess that the credit of the improvement was not her own; but a moment's reflection reminded her that she had not received permission to divulge the secret, and kissing affectionately her father's hand, she thanked him for his encouragement.

'At the appointed hour she was on the spot, awaiting the fairy, who soon appeared. A benignant smile overspread her features.

"Well, Elizabetha," she said, "and hast thou found that I have deserved thy gratitude?"

"Kind fairy," cried the young girl, "I cannot thank thee enough. Ask of me what thou wilt, I shall be only too ready to perform it."

The fairy smiled. "My condition is a very simple one," she said. "It is only this. Whenever, Elizabetha, you feel yourself in the least degree discomposed or out of temper, utter no word till you have mentally counted the magic number seven. And if you follow this rule, it will be but seldom that your tongue, of which I now restore to you the full control" (she touched it again with her wand as she spoke) "will lead you into trouble. Your disposition, though generous, is naturally hasty and impulsive, and till by a long course of self-restraint you have acquired complete mastery over yourself, you will find that I was right in my experiment of obliging your tongue to utter the exact opposite of what you, in your first haste, would have expressed."

'And before Elizabetha could reply, she had disappeared.

'But Elizabetha kept her promise, and to thus following her fairy friend's advice she owes it that she is now the object of universal esteem and affection, instead of being hated, despised, and feared as the owner of "a hasty tongue."'"

Cecil stopped.

"Is that all?" said Carrots.

"Yes, that's all. Did you like it?"

"I did understand better about the fairy," Carrots replied. "I think she was a werry good fairy; don't you, Floss?"

"*Very*," said Floss. "I think," she went on, "whenever I am cross, I shall *fancy* my tongue is bewitched, just to see if it would be best to say the opposite of what I was going to say. Wouldn't it be fun?"

"Better than fun, perhaps, Miss Flossie," said nurse. "I think it would be a very good thing if big people, too, were sometimes to follow the fairy's rule."

"People as big as you, nursie?" asked Carrots.

"Oh, yes, my dear," said nurse. "It's a lesson we're all slow to learn, and many haven't learnt it by the end of their threescore years and ten—'to be slow to anger,' and to keep our tongues from evil."

"*That's* out of the Bible, nursie, all of it," said Floss, as if not altogether sure that she approved of the quotation.

Cecil laughed.

"What are you laughing at, Cis?" said Floss. "It *is* out of the Bible."

"Well, no one said it wasn't," said Cecil.

"Cis," said Carrots, "will you read us another story, another day?"

"If I can find one that you can understand," said Cecil.

"Never mind if I can't," replied Carrots. "I like to hear you reading, even if I can't understand. I like your voice. I *think*," he added after a pause, "I *think*, Cis, I'll marry you too, when I'm big. You and Floss, and nurse."

So Cecil had good reason to feel that she was greatly appreciated in the nursery.

CHAPTER IX

SYBIL

“The children crowned themselves with wishes,
And every wish came true.”

CROWNS FOR CHILDREN.

BUT it is not always, or even often, that wishes “come true,” is it children? Or if they do come true, it is in a different way; so different that they hardly seem the same. Like the little old woman in the ballad, who turned herself about and wondered and puzzled, but couldn’t make out if she was herself or not, we stare at our fulfilled wishes and examine them on every side but in their altered dress—so different from, and, very seldom, if ever, as pretty as that which they wore in our imagination—we cannot believe that they are themselves!

Do you remember the fancies that Carrots and Floss used to have about their cousin Sybil, and how they wished for her to come to see them? Well, about a fortnight after the affair of the lost half-sovereign, Sybil actually *did* come to see them! She and her mamma. But it all happened quite differently from the way the children had planned it, so that just at first they could hardly believe it *was* “a wish come true,” though afterwards, when it was over, and they began to look back to it as a real thing instead of forward to it as a fancy, they grew to think it had really turned out nicer than any of their fancies.

You would like to hear all about it, I dare say.

It took them all by surprise—this sudden visit of Sybil and her mother, I mean. There was no time for planning or arranging anything. There just came a telegram one afternoon, to say that Mrs.—no, I don’t think I will tell you the name of Sybil’s mother, I want you just to think of her as “auntie”—and her little girl would arrive at Sandyshore, late that same evening, “to stay one day,” said the telegram, on their way to some other place. it does not matter where.

It was several years since Captain Desart had seen his sister—that is, "auntie." He had been abroad at the time of her marriage, for she was a good many years younger than he, and since then, *she* and her husband had been a great deal out of England. But now at last they were going to have a settled home, and though it was a good way from Sandyshore, still it was not like being in another country.

"I am sorry Florence can only stay one day," said Mrs. Desart to her husband; "it seems hardly worth while for her to come so far out of her way for so short a time."

"I am sorry too," said Captain Desart; "but a day's better than nothing."

Floss and Carrots were sorry *too*—but what they were *most* sorry for was not that Sybil and her mamma were only going to stay there one day, it was that they would not arrive till after the children's bedtime! So much after that there could not even be a question of their "sitting up till they come." There was even a doubt of Cecil and Louise doing so, and Floss could not help feeling rather pleased at Mott's getting a decided snub from his father when he broached the subject on his own account.

"Sit up till after ten o'clock—nonsense. Nobody wants you. Go to bed as usual, of course," said Captain Desart.

"How tired that poor little girl will be!" said Mrs. Desart pityingly. "Children, you must all be quiet in the morning so as not to wake her early. And you must be very gentle and kind to her, for you know she is not accustomed to companions."

"Yes, mamma," said Floss and Carrots promptly. Mott said nothing, for, *of course*, the speech could not have been addressed to *him*. Mr. Maurice Desart, nearly thirteen years old, could not be supposed to be a companion to a mite of a girl of six.

"It won't be difficult to be quiet to-morrow morning," said Floss to Carrots, "for I expect I shall be very sleepy, as I have

quite made up my mind to stay awake to-night, till I hear them come."

It was then eight o'clock, and Floss was going to bed. Carrots had been in bed nearly an hour, but was not yet asleep. He soon dropped off, however, and how long do you think Floss kept awake? Till twenty-three minutes past eight, or not so late probably, for that was the time by the nursery clock, when nurse came in to see that her charges were tucked up for the night, and found them both fast asleep!

They were in a state of great expectation the next morning when they were being dressed, but they remembered their promise and were very quiet.

"When shall we see Sybil?" asked Carrots; "Will she have breakfast in the nursery?"

"Of course not," said Floss, "she won't be up for ever so long. I dare say."

"Poor little thing, she must be very tired," said nurse.

"Did you see her last night?" asked Floss eagerly.

Nurse shook her head. "It was past ten when they arrived," she said, "the little lady was put to bed at once, your mamma and sisters only saw her for a minute."

So Floss and Carrots ate their bread and milk in undiminished curiosity. Not long afterwards the bell rang for prayers in the dining-room as usual, and the two, hand in hand, went in to take their places among the others.

They were rather late, Captain Desart had the Prayer Book and Bible open before him, and was looking impatient, so Floss and Carrots sat down on their little chairs and left "good-mornings" till after prayers. There was a strange lady beside their mother, and, yes, beside the strange lady a strange little girl! Was *that* Sybil? Where was the fair-haired, blue-eyed, waxen, doll-like Sybil, they had expected to see?

What they did see was worth looking at, however. It was a very pretty Sybil after all. Small and dark, dark-eyed, dark-

haired, and browny-red as to complexion. Sybil was more like a gipsy than an angel as they had fancied her. She had *very* pretty, very bright, noticing eyes and she was pretty altogether. She was dressed in black velvet with a bright crimson sash, and her hair was tied with crimson ribbon; her neat little legs were clothed in black silk stockings, and there were buckles on her tiny shoes.

Floss and Carrots hardly dared to stare at her, for her eyes seemed to be noticing them all over, and when prayers were finished, and their mamma called them to come to speak to their aunt and cousin, do you know they actually both felt quite shy of Sybil, small as she was? More shy of her than of their aunt, somehow; *she* seemed more like what they had expected, or, perhaps, the truth was they had "expected" much less about her. Besides no children ever were shy with auntie, such a thing would have been impossible.

They kissed Sybil, Floss feeling very tall and lanky beside her compact tiny cousin, and Carrots feeling I don't know how. He just looked at Sybil with his soft wondering brown eyes, in such a solemn way that at last she burst out laughing.

"What a funny boy you are!" she exclaimed. "Mother dear, *isn't* he a funny boy?"

"Aren't you very tired, Sybil?" said Floss, afraid that she would be laughed at as "a funny girl," next.

"No, thank you," said Sybil, quite grave, and like a grown-up person, all in a minute. "I'm becustomed to travelling. I'm not tired at all, but I'll tell you what I am—I'm," and out broke her merry laugh again, "I'm very *hungry*."

"That's a broad hint," said Captain Desart, laughing too. "Florence, your daughter is ready for breakfast, do you hear? Where will you sit, Miss Sybil? Besides your old uncle, eh?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Sybil, "if you won't call me Miss Sybil, please. And may this little boy sit 'aside me?'"

"This little boy and this little girl have had their breakfast,"

said Mrs. Desart. "Run off, Carrots and Floss, you are both to have a whole holiday you know, so Sybil will see plenty of you."

"I wish they could see more of each other," said auntie, as the children left the room. "Sometime you must let them both come and pay us a long visit, when we are really settled you know."

Auntie gave a little sigh as she said this—she felt so tender and kind to Carrots and Floss, and something made her a little sorry for them. Though they were healthy, happy-looking children, and their dress was neat and cared for, they did not look like her Sybil, whose clothes were always like those of a little princess. Floss's frock was rather faded-looking, and there was a mark where it had been let down, and Carrots' brown holland blouse had arrived at a very *whitey*-brown shade, through much wear and washing.

"It must be hard work with so many children, and such small means," she thought to herself, for auntie had been married young to a rich man, and knew little of "making both ends meet"; but aloud she only said, "how lovely little Fabian would look in black velvet, Lucy! What a complexion he has!"

"Yes, if you can forgive him his hair," said Mrs. Desart.

"I think his hair is beautiful," observed Sybil and then went on eating her breakfast.

They all laughed, but there was still a little sigh at the bottom of auntie's heart. There was reason for it greater than the sight of her little nephew's and niece's shabby clothes.

But there was no sigh in the hearts of Floss and Carrots.

"Carrots," said Floss, as they made their way to the nursery to decide which of their small collection of toys were fit for Sybil's inspection, "Carrots, *did* you hear?"

"What auntie said?" asked Carrots. "Yes, I heard. Do you think mamma will ever let us go?"

"Some day, perhaps," said Floss, and oh, what dreams and

plans and fancies hung on that "perhaps"! "*Fancy*, Carrots, we should go in the railway, you and me, Carrots, alone perhaps."

"Oh, Floss!" said Carrots, his feelings being beyond further expression.

That "some day" was a good way off, however, but "to-day" was here, and a nice bright-looking to-day it was. How happy they were! How happy Sybil was!

For, somehow, though she was dressed like a princess, though since babyhood she had had *everything* a child could wish for, though very often, I must confess, she had had "her own way," a good deal more than would have been good for most children, little Sybil was not spoilt. The spoiling dropped off her like water down a duck's back, and auntie never found out it had been there at all! Perhaps after all there is a kind of spoiling that isn't spoiling—love and kindness, and even indulgence, do not spoil when there is perfect trust and openness, and when a child at the same time is taught the one great lesson, that the best happiness is trying to make others happy too.

They played on the sands nearly all day, and Sybil, to her great delight, was covered up from damage by one of Carrots' blouses. The sun came out bright and warm, and they built the most lovely sand house you ever saw.

"I'd like to live in it always," said Carrots.

"Oh, you funny boy," said Sybil patronisingly, "and what would you do at night, when it got cold, and perhaps the sea would come in."

"Perhaps the mermaids would take care of him till the morning," said Floss.

"What are the mermaids?" asked Sybil.

"Pretty ladies," said Carrots, "who live at the bottom of the sea, only they've got tails."

"Then they can't be pretty," said Sybil decidedly, "not unless their tails are beautiful and sweeping out, like peacocks! 'Are they?—One day I tied a shawl of mother's on, it was a red

and gold shawl, and I swept it about just like a peacock,—that *would* be pretty."

"I don't think mermaids' tails are like that," said Carrots, doubtfully, "but they *are* pretty ladies, aren't they, Floss?"

"Beautiful," said Floss, "but they're very sad. They come up to the shore at night and comb their hair and cry dreadfully."

"What do they cry for?" asked Sybil and Carrots, pressing up to Floss, and forgetting all about the lovely sand house.

"Because they—no, you couldn't understand," she broke off; "it is no good telling you."

"Oh, do tell," said the children.

"Well," said Floss, "I read in a book of Cecil's, they cry because they haven't got any souls. When they die they can't go to heaven, you see."

Sybil and Carrots looked very solemn at this. Then a sudden thought struck Carrots.

"How can they cry if they haven't got souls, Floss?" he said, "Nurse says it's our souls that make us glad and sorry. Are you *sure* the poor mermaids haven't got souls?"

"I'm only telling you what I read in a book," said Floss. "I dare say it's all a sort of fairy tale. Don't you like fairy tales, Sybil?"

"No," said Sybil, "I like stories of naughty boys and girls best—*very* naughty boys and girls."

"Oh, Sybil!" said Carrots, "I don't, because they are always unhappy in the end."

"No, they're not. Sometimes they all get good. Mother always makes them get good at the end," replied Sybil.

"Does auntie tell you stories?" said Floss.

"Yes, of course, for I can't read them to myself yet. I'm learning, but it is *so* hard," said Sybil dolefully.

"I wish auntie would tell *us* stories."

"P'raps she will when you come to my house," said Sybil, encouragingly. "Would you think that a treat?"

"It would be a 'normous treat."

"We're going to have a treat to-day," said Floss. "We're going to have tea in the dining-room with you, Sybil, and auntie and everybody, and I think it's time to go in now, because we must change our frocks."

Carrots had never had tea in the dining-room before, and felt a little overpowered by the honour. He sat very still, and took whatever was offered to him, as nurse had taught him. Cecil poured out the tea, and to please the children she put an extra allowance of sugar into their cups. Carrots tasted his, and was just thinking how very nice it was, when it flashed across his mind that he should not have had any sugar. He put down his cup and looked round him in great perplexity. If only he could ask Floss. But Floss was at the other side of the table, she seemed to be drinking her tea without any misgiving. Wasn't it naughty? Could she have forgotten? Carrots grew more and more unhappy; the tears filled his eyes, and his face got scarlet.

"What's the matter, dear?" said auntie, who was sitting next him, "Is your tea too hot? Has it scalded your poor little mouth?"

She said it in a low voice. She was so kind and "understanding," she knew Carrots would not have liked everybody round the table to begin noticing him, and as she looked at him more closely, she saw that the tears in his eyes were those of distress, not of "scalding."

"No, thank you," said Carrots, looking up in auntie's face in his perplexity; "it isn't that. My tea is *werry* good, but it's got sugar in."

"And you don't like sugar? Poor old man! Never mind, Cecil will give you another cup. You're not like Sybil in your tastes," said auntie, kindly, and she turned to ask Cecil for some sugarless tea for her little brother.

"No, no, auntie. Oh, *please* don't," whispered Carrots, his

trouble increasing, and pulling hard at his aunt's sleeve as he spoke, "I *do* like sugar werry much—it isn't that. But mamma said I was never, never to take nucken that wasn't mine. and sugar won't be mine for two weeks more, nurse says."

Auntie stared at her little nephew in blank bewilderment. What *did* he mean? Even her quick wits were quite at fault.

"What do you mean, my dear little boy?" she said.

Suddenly a new complication struck poor Carrots.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "it's a secret, it's a secret, and I'm telling it," and he burst into tears.

It was impossible now to hide his trouble. Everybody began to cross-question him.

"Cry-baby," muttered Maurice, and even Mrs. Desart said, "Carrots, I wonder at your behaving so when your aunt and cousin are here. Floss, do you know what is the matter with him?"

"No, mamma," said Floss, looking as she always did when Carrots was in distress, ready to cry herself.

"Carrots," said Captain Desart, sharply, "go to the nursery till you learn to behave properly."

Carrots got slowly down off his high chair, and crept away. But everybody looked troubled and uncomfortable.

Auntie hated to see people looking troubled and uncomfortable. She thought a minute, and then she turned to Mrs. Desart.

"Lucy," she said, "will you let me try what I can do with the poor little fellow? I am sure it was not naughtiness made him cry."

And almost before Mrs. Desart could reply, auntie was off to the nursery in search of Carrots.

He had left off crying, and was sitting quietly by the window, looking out at his old friend the sea.

"What are you thinking about, my poor old man?" said auntie, fondly.

Carrots looked up at her. "I like you to call me that," he said. "I was thinking about our hoops and what a long time four weeks is."

"Has that to do with you having no sugar?" asked auntie.

"Yes," said Carrots. "How *did* you guess? You're like a fairy, auntie." But then his face grew troubled again. "I forgot," he went on, "it's a secret. It's Floss's secret too. I would so like to tell you, for I don't know what to do. I don't mind having no tea, but they all thought I was naughty."

"Wait a minute," said auntie. She hurried out of the room, but was back in a minute.

"I've asked Floss," she said, "and she gives you leave to tell me. So now, perhaps, when I know all about it, I can tell you what to do."

The telling did not take Carrots long; he was so glad to show auntie he had not meant to be naughty. Auntie listened quite gravely, and when he had finished she said she thought he was quite right not to take any sugar.

"But do you think Floss did?" said Carrots, anxiously.

"Perhaps having tea in the dining-room made her forget," said auntie. "We'll ask her afterwards, and if she did forget, I'll tell you what she must do. She must go without one day longer than you. Now come along with me, and I'll make it all right, you'll see."

When they got back to the dining-room auntie quietly lifted Carrots onto his chair again, and said to his mamma with a smile, "It was all a mistake; I thought it was; Carrots was not naughty at all, and he is quite happy again now."

And Mrs. Desart smiled too, so Carrots really did feel happy again. But he wondered what auntie would do about the tea, which was still standing there as he had left it, and it would be wrong to "waste" it, thought Carrots.

Sybil was sitting on auntie's other side, and auntie glancing

at her cup saw that it was empty. So auntie quietly put Carrots' cup before Sybil and gave Carrots the empty one.

"Cecil," she said, "will you give Carrots some tea without any sugar?"

Cecil saw that auntie had some reason for asking this, so she gave Carrots the tea as auntie said, and Carrots drank it and ate his bread and butter and a piece of cake, with great content.

The only person who did not seem *quite* contented was Sybil.

"Mother," she whispered, "I don't like having Carrots' tea. It's quite cold."

But as Carrots didn't hear it, it didn't much matter. For you see, Sybil had had one cup of nice hot tea, so she was not so badly off after all.

And, alas! the very next morning auntie and Sybil had to go away. And the long-talked-of and fancied-about visit was over.

CHAPTER X

A JOURNEY AND ITS ENDING

"The way was long, the wind was cold."

SOON after auntie's visit summer really began to come. It was very pleasant while it lasted, but this year it was a very short summer, and the winter that came after was a very severe one, and made many people ill. It did not make Carrots ill, nor Floss, nor any of the Desart children, for they were all strong, but it was very bad for their mother. As the winter went on, she seemed to get weaker and weaker; there were very few days on which she could go out, and if the spring had not been an early and very mild one I hardly think her strength would have lasted.

But with the finer weather she seemed to get better again.

The children were of course very glad, but still they had not felt frightened by her illness. It had come on so slowly and gradually that they had got accustomed to it, as children do. They thought it was just the cold wintry weather that had made her ill, and that when the spring came she would get better. And when the spring came and she *did* get better, they were perfectly satisfied and happy.

By the end of *this* summer Carrots was seven years old—no longer in the least a baby, though he was not tall for his age. He could read, of course, perfectly, and write a little. Now and then he wrote little letters to Sybil in answer to hers, for she was very particular about getting answers. She was only just beginning to learn to write, and sometimes when she got tired of working away at real "A's" and "B's" and "C's" in her letters, she would dash off into a lot of "scribble," which she said was "children's writing," and "if Carrots didn't know what it meant he must be very stupid, as he was a child too."

Carrots *didn't* know what it meant, but he never liked to say so, and I dare say it did not much matter. But *his* letters to Sybil were quite real. Any one could have understood them.

Long ago Floss and he had bought their hoops. They were quite "old friends" now. They had bought them at the toy-shop, just as they had planned, and, curiously enough when their mamma and nurse counted up how much was owing to them for the sugar, it came to *exactly* the price of the hoops.

But I must tell you what happened just about the time Carrots had his seventh birthday. The summer was nearly over again, and already the cold winds, of which there were so many at Sandyshore, were beginning to be felt. Floss noticed that her mother very seldom went out now, and even in the house she generally had to wrap herself up in a shawl.

"Mamma, I hope the cold weather isn't going to make you ill again?" Floss said, one day when she and Carrots came in from a race on the sands, all hot and rosy with running.

"I don't know, dear," said her mother with a little sigh.

"I wish you could run about like us. That would make you *so* hot," said Carrots.

Mrs. Desart smiled. Just then her glance happened to fall on Floss's boots. "My dear child," she said, "those boots are really not fit to go out with. There's a great hole at the side of one of them."

"I know, mamma," said Floss, "but they're going to be mended. Nurse thinks they'll do a good while longer, if they're mended. I hope they will, for I know you always have so many new things to get when winter begins to come—haven't you, mamma?"

Mrs. Desart sighed again.

"I should have liked all your things to be so nice," she said, more as if speaking to herself than to Floss, "but it can't be helped."

Something in her tone caught Floss's attention.

"Why, mamma," she asked, "why did you want our things to be so nice?"

"Because, dears, you may be going away from home," replied Mrs. Desart.

Floss and Carrots stared with astonishment. "Going away from home," Floss repeated, utterly unable to say more. Carrots could say nothing at all, he could *only* stare.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Desart, "I had meant to tell you all about it before, but I have kept putting it off——" she stopped and seemed to hesitate.

"Why, mamma?" said Floss again. "Don't you like us to go? Are you coming with us, mamma?"

"Are we going to auntie's?" said Carrots.

His asking this seemed to please his mother.

"You would like to go to auntie's, wouldn't you, Carrots?" she said.

Carrots stroked his mother's shawl up and down two or three times before he answered.

"I'd like to go if you would come too," he said at last, "but I think I would rather stay at home, thank you, if you can't come."

Mrs. Desart's eyes filled with tears. "Poor little Carrots!" she said, softly smoothing his curls with her hand. "But if it would please me for Floss and you to go without me?" she said.

"I'll go if you want me to go, mamma," said Carrots.

"I must explain a little," said Mrs. Desart, and then she went on to tell the children how it was. The doctor had said she must not risk another winter at Sandyshore, and it had been arranged for her to go to a warmer climate. Cecil and Louise were to go with her; Captain Desart would be with them as much as he possibly could, and Maurice was to live at school. And what concerned the two little ones almost more than anything, *nurse* was to go too! "I must have some one kind and sensible with me, in case, in case——" and again Mrs. Desart hesitated.

"In case you were very tired with travelling, or if you were to get a bad cold again; somebody who could make nice white wine whey and things like that," said Floss, who was of a practical turn of mind, "oh yes, mamma, I quite understand."

"Though *nurse* is getting old, she has been so much accustomed to travelling, too," said Mrs. Desart, "and we are going a long way—to Algeria; Floss, do you know where that is?"

"Over the sea!" said Floss, "I wish we might come too, mamma, Carrots and I," she exclaimed. "You will be so far away."

"But you will be with auntie, and you know how kind auntie is," said her mother, forcing herself to speak cheerfully. "And it is such a pretty place where auntie lives."

"Is the sea there?" said Carrots.

"No, but the hills are," answered Mrs. Desart with a smile.

"I am quite sure you will like it." And she went on to tell them so much about auntie's pretty home that for a little they almost forgot everything but the pleasant part of the change that was to come so soon.

And it did come very soon. It seemed but a few days from the afternoon they had first heard about it all, when Floss and Carrots found themselves early one morning at the little railway station with their father, waiting for the train.

Captain Desart was to travel with them for the first hour, to take them to the "junction" where they were to change and get into a train which would take them straight to Whitefriars, near which was auntie's house.

You will laugh, children, I dare say, and think Floss and Carrots very countrified and ignorant when I tell you that they had never been a long railway journey before. Never, that is to say, that they could *remember*—for their parents had come to Sandyshore when Floss was a baby, and Carrots, as you know, had been born there.

So you can hardly fancy what a wonderful event this journey was to them.

Their little hearts were very full at first after parting with their mother, and sisters, and nurse, and all that made the Cove House home to them.

And their mamma had kissed them so *many* times, as if she could not really say good-bye, though she was not generally a very petting or kissing mamma, but rather quiet and grave.

And nurse had the tears in her eyes, and Louise had them pouring down her face, and Cecil had *her* face squeezed up in a sort of way that Floss knew meant she was determined she would not cry. Floss felt troubled in a way she could not understand, and I think Carrots did too. They had a feeling that the bigger people knew of more reason for sorrow than had been told to them, and yet they could not imagine what it could be. And after all, to *them* the parting for even four or five

months was almost as great a trouble as they could understand, only, they were going to "auntie's"!

"And we will try to be so good, dear mamma," said Floss, bravely choking down her tears. "We will try to get on with our lessons, too, and write you nice letters. And—and—" here a sob or two *would* make its way, "I can't help crying a little; but I'm sure we shall be very happy, won't we, Carrots?"

"If mamma wants us to be happy, we'll *try*, won't we, Floss?" said Carrots. He wiped the tears on his mother's cheeks with his own little pocket-handkerchief and looked up in her face piteously. "Please don't cry, poor mamma," he said; "we *will* be good and happy."

Then their father came in and hurried them off, and the farewells were over—that part of them, at least, for the saying good-bye to Captain Desart at the junction was rather hard too.

And at last Floss and Carrots find themselves at the height of their ambition—alone in a railway carriage travelling to auntie's! But they do not seem so delighted as they used to fancy they would; they do not jump about and laugh and chatter in their overflowing pleasure—they sit quite still, side by side, holding each other's hands and with little quiet, grave faces.

"Things never come the same as people fancy," said Floss at last. "We never thought we should go to auntie's because poor mamma was ill, did we, Carrots?"

"No, we never did," said Carrots. "But mamma will soon get better, won't she, Floss, at that nice warm place?"

"Oh, yes, of course she will," said Floss. "But it's a long way away, Carrots, and I never thought going to auntie's would be like this."

"No," agreed Carrots again, "we never did."

"I'm so sorry to leave them all, aren't you, Carrots?" said Floss, her voice trembling a little.

"Yes," said Carrots; "and, Floss, I'm very sorry, too, to leave the sea. I never left the sea before, you know."

"But the *sea* won't miss you," said Floss, "and poor mamma and nursie and all of them *will* miss us. That's what I keep thinking of."

"When should we eat our dinner, Floss?" said Carrots, with an instinct that it would be as well to change the subject.

"Not just yet. When we've gone about half-way would do; and papa said that great big place, Millingham, would be about half-way."

"But if there were any other people to get into the carriage?" said Carrots.

"Well, it wouldn't matter," said Floss. "People must eat when they are travelling."

"But wouldn't we have to ask them to have some too?" suggested Carrots.

"I don't know," said Floss; "I never thought of that. Perhaps it *would* be polite. But there are only eight sandwiches, Carrots; eight sandwiches and four sponge cakes and a packet of Albert biscuits. I hope a great many people won't get in."

No one got in at the next station. Only the guard put his head in at the door, as Captain Desart had asked him to do, to see how the little pair were getting on. Carrots had thoughts of offering *him* a sandwich, but he disappeared before there was time to do so, which Floss thought very fortunate when she heard of Carrots' intention. "For you see," she said, "if we began offering them to him, we would have to do it at every station, and if there are eight stations before Whitefriars, all our sandwiches would be gone."

"He might have a biscuit for a change," said Carrots, submissive, but scarcely convinced. "He is a nice man, Floss—he calls us 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss.' Do you think papa told him to say 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss'?"

But before Floss had time to answer they had stopped again, and this time some one did get into their carriage. The newcomer was a small neat, oldish lady. She looked rather

grim at first, but after a while she grew decidedly friendly, and no wonder; for at Millingham, Floss and Carrots unpacked their little basket of provisions, and I don't think the grimmest of maiden ladies could have remained grim after the politeness with which the children treated her.

They selected the nicest-looking sandwich, putting it on an Albert biscuit by way of a plate, and then, at a sign from Floss, Carrots clambered down from his seat and gravely offered it to the lady.

"I'm sorry there's no mustard, if you like mustard," said Floss; "but Carrots and I don't like it, and—and—I suppose nurse didn't think of any one else."

The oldish lady looked at the children for a moment before she replied.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said at last, "but I think I won't take a sandwich, as I had luncheon before I left home. But if you will allow me I will have a biscuit. I am very fond of biscuits."

"I'm so glad," said Floss, hospitably. "Now, Carrots," she said in a lower voice, "you eat two sandwiches and I'll eat two, and we'll each have one sponge cake. And that'll do for dinner. We'll eat the rest in about an hour and pretend we're having tea early."

The lady asked them a good many questions after this, and told them they were such well-behaved children she would not mind travelling all the way to Whitefriars with them. Floss blushed a little at this; it made her feel shy to be praised to her face, but still no doubt the lady meant it kindly, and they were rather sorry when she left them, some stations before they got to Whitefriars. Their old friend the guard left them here, too, but he popped his head in for the last time to say that he was going to speak for them to "him that was coming on now." And Floss thanked him, though she had not the least idea what he meant.

But there must have been some mistake about it, for the new guard never came near them, and when, at the last stoppage before Whitefriars, another man threw the door open and demanded "tickets," Floss felt too startled by his rough manner to ask him what they were longing to know, how far they still had to go. But he took away the tickets. "So we can't have very far to go," said Floss. "Papa said they would take away the tickets a little before we got to Whitefriars."

"Will auntie be at the station?" said Carrots.

"Yes, I'm sure she will," said Floss. "Auntie and Sybil too, perhaps. Carrots, I do believe we're there; the train's stopping."

And in another minute they found themselves in a nice clean-looking station with several people standing about on the platform, evidently waiting for the train.

The children looked out eagerly. There were two or three ladies, one little girl, and a few other people—but no auntie, no Sybil!

"P'raps this isn't the place," said carrots.

"Please, is this Whitefriars?" inquired Floss of a porter who just then threw open the door.

"Whitefriars, yes, miss. Any luggage?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss anxiously, "a great deal. It's in one of the luggage carriages, and it's marked with our name."

The man smiled. "Will you come with me, missie, and show me which it is, and I'll get it all right for you."

"Oh, thank you," said Floss, gathering together their cloaks and baskets, and preparing to descend.

"What a *kind* man," whispered Carrots; and when the porter lifted him out of the carriage he took hold of his hand and ran along beside him as fast as his little legs could keep up.

Floss felt quite bewildered at first, when she saw the heaps and heaps of luggage lying on the platform, all labelled "Whitefriars." It seemed to her that everybody must have been travel-

ling to Whitefriars to-day! But by degrees it was claimed and melted away, and the kind porter, to whom she had already pointed out their "great deal"—one portmanteau, one bag, and a small tin hat-box—soon picked it up and stood waiting for further orders.

"Where am I to take it to, please, miss?" he said. "Is there no one here to meet you?"

"I don't think so, I don't know what to do," said Floss, looking sadly troubled again. In the excitement of finding the luggage she had forgotten this new difficulty, but now it returned in full force.

"Have you far to go?" said the man.

"Oh, no," said Floss, "auntie's house is near here, I know."

"Then perhaps little master and you had better walk on, and send for the luggage afterwards?" suggested the man, never doubting from Floss's manner that the children were accustomed to the place, and knew their way.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Floss uncertainly.

"Or shall I fetch you a fly from the *Blue Boar*?" said the man. "The station flies has all drove off."

"No, thank you; I don't think I have enough money for that," said Floss, feeling in her pocket for her purse, which she knew contained only her father's parting gift of half-a-crown, a sixpence with a hole in it, and three pennies of Carrots'! "Your auntie says she will get you *everything* you want, so I need not give you any money with you," their mother had said. Floss had no idea what a fly from the *Blue Boar* would cost, but it sounded very grand, and she hardly dared to risk it.

"Well, I dare say you'll be safest to walk," said the porter, rather afraid of getting himself into a scrape if he fetched the children a fly without proper authority, and feeling uncertain, from their very plain and rather "countryfied" appearance, if their friends belonged to the fly patronising class or not. "I'll keep

the luggage safe till it's sent for—no fear," and with a friendly nod he marched off with their possessions.

Holding Carrots by the hand, Floss made her way out of the station. For about a quarter of a mile the road ran straight before them and they trudged along contentedly enough. But after awhile they came to a point where two roads met, one leading to the little watering-place (for the station was some way from the town), the other out into the country. And for the first time it struck Floss that she did not know the way. She looked about her in perplexity.

"It cannot be far," she said; "mamma always said auntie lived *near* Whitefriars. But I wish I knew which way to go."

Carrots had no suggestion to offer. To make matters worse, it began to rain—a cold, sleety, late October rain; the children had no umbrella, and were already tired and hungry. I think it was much to their credit that they did not lose heart altogether.

Just as Floss was making up her mind to take the turn leading in the distance to terraces of houses and gardens and other signs of civilisation, there came, jogging along the road on a cart-horse, a farmer's boy. Joyful sight! Floss plucked up heart.

"Can you tell me, please," she called out, "which is the way to Greenmays?"

The farmer's boy turned his thumb in the direction of the country road. "Yonder," he shouted, without stopping in his jog, "straight on past the church, and down lane to left."

"Is it far?" asked Floss, but the boy did not seem to hear.

There was nothing for it but to go on with their trudge. The rain was not heavy but very piercingly cold, and the daylight was beginning to fade. Two or three hot tears at last forced their way down Floss's cheeks, but she wiped them quickly away, before Carrots could see them. Carrots said nothing, but Floss knew he was getting tired by the way he kept lagging

behind, every now and then giving a little run to get up to Floss again.

"I shouldn't mind so much, Floss," he said at last, "if it would be home when we get there, and if we were to find mamma and nurse and tea in our own nursery waiting for us."

This was altogether too much for Floss. For a moment or two she could not speak, she was choked with sobs. "Oh, how I do wish poor mamma hadn't got ill," she said at last.

"Poor Flossie, dear Flossie," said Carrots, pulling down her face to kiss in spite of the rain and the dark and the cold and everything. "I didn't mean to make you cry. And auntie will be very kind when we get there, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh yes," said Floss, trying to speak cheerfully, though in her secret heart there was a little misgiving. It did not look very kind not to have sent to meet them at the station, and even without this, Floss, though she had not said so, had felt a little shy and frightened at the thought of meeting auntie and the strange uncle, and even Sybil again. It was nearly two years since the visit to Sandyshore, and two years is a lifetime to a child—it seemed to Floss like going altogether among strangers. She clasped her little brother's hand tighter as these feelings passed through her mind. "It won't be so bad for Carrots," she reflected; "anyway he will have me."

They seemed to have walked a very weary way when at last the church, of which the farmer's boy had spoken, came in sight—very dimly in sight, for the daylight was fast dying away. Floss would have passed the church without noticing it, but the road divided in two just at this place, and she was obliged to think which way to go. Then the boy's directions came into her mind.

"To the left past the church, didn't he say, Carrots?" she said.

"'Down lane to left,' he said," replied Carrots.

"Then it *must* be this way," said Floss, and on they trudged.

In a few minutes they came to large gates, on one side of which stood a pretty little house; but such a little house, hardly bigger than a cottage.

"Is that auntie's house?" said Carrots.

"I'm afraid it's too little to be auntie's house," said Floss. "I wish it was. I would *much* rather auntie lived in a cottage."

"Just like Mrs. White's," said Carrots.

Floss could not help laughing at him; it had left off raining and her spirits were rising a little.

"Look, Carrots," she said, "there is a light in the cottage window. We'd better knock at the door and ask if it is auntie's house. It's getting rather like a fairy story, isn't it, Carrots? Fancy if somebody calls out 'Pull the string and the latch will open.' "

"But that would be the wolf, Floss," said Carrots, pressing closer to his sister.

It was no wolf, but a nice, tidy-looking woman with a white cap and a baby in her arms who opened the door, and stood staring at the two little wayfarers in bewilderment. Floss grew afraid that she was angry.

"I'm very sorry—I mean I beg your pardon," she began. "I didn't know this was your house. We thought perhaps it was auntie's. Can you tell me please, where Greenmays is?"

"This *is* Greenmays," said the woman. Floss stared: the door opened right into the kitchen, it couldn't be auntie's house.

"This is the lodge," continued the woman. "If it's some one at the big house you're wanting, you must just go straight up the drive. I'd show you the way," she went on, "but my husband's up at the stables and it's too cold for baby. You seem wet and tired, you do—have you come far?"

"Yes," said Floss, wearily, "*very* far. We thought auntie would meet us at the station, but there wasn't anybody."

"They must be kin to the housekeeper, surely," thought the woman. And yet something indescribable in Floss's manner,



and in the clear, well-bred tones of her small, childish voice, prevented her asking if this was so. "I wish I could go with you to the house," she repeated, curiosity and kindness alike prompting her, "but," she added, looking doubtfully at the sleeping child in her arms, "I'm afeared for baby."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, thank you," said Floss, "we can find the way, I dare say. Good-evening," and taking Carrots by the hand, she turned to go.

"Good-evening," said little Carrots also.

"Good-evening, and I hope you'll find your auntie in," said the woman. And for a few minutes she stood at the door straining her eyes after the two forlorn little figures till she could distinguish them no longer in the darkness of the trees bordering the avenue. "Who can they be?" she said to herself. "Such a pretty spoken, old-fashioned little pair I never did see!"

CHAPTER XI

HAPPY AND SAD

" 'Tis gone—and in a merry fit
They run upstairs in gamesome race.
* * * * * * *
A moment's heaviness they feel,
A sadness at the heart."

THE MOTHER'S RETURN.

IT was very dark in the drive, and Carrots crept close to Floss. But Floss felt far less afraid of the dark than of the light when at last the house came in view and the brightly lit up windows shone out into the gloom.

"Oh, what a big house," said Floss. "Oh, Carrots, how I do wish that little cottage had been auntie's house, even though the door did open right into the kitchen. Don't you, Carrots?"

"I don't know," replied Carrots, "auntie will be very kind to us, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss, "but supposing she is having a party to-night, Carrots?"

"Well, we could have tea in the nursery, and go to bed," said Carrots philosophically. "Oh, Floss, *wouldn't* you like some nice hot tea and bread and butter?"

"Poor Carrots," said Floss. And her anxiety to see her little brother in comfort again gave her courage to ring the bell as loudly as she could.

A man servant opened the door. Very tall and formidable he looked to the two children, whose eyes were dazzled by the sudden light, after their long walk in the dusk.

"If you please," said Floss, "is auntie at home?"

The man stared. "*What* did you say?" he inquired. "Is it a message from some one?"

"Oh, no," said Floss, "it's just that we've come, Carrots and I—will you please tell auntie? We've walked all the way from the station, because there was no one to meet us."

The man still stared. He had heard something about a young lady and gentleman, his mistress's nephew and niece, being expected on a visit, but his ideas were rather slow. He could not all at once take in that the dilapidated little couple before him could possibly be the looked for guests.

But just then another person came upon the scene. A little figure with bright dark eyes and flying hair came dancing into the hall.

"Who's there, Fletcher?" she said. "Is it the post?"

"No, miss," said Fletcher, rather glad of some one to consult in his perplexity. "I don't know who it is—that's to say, it's a little boy and girl who say as they've come from the station, but I can't justly make out who it is they want."

"How funny," said Sybil, coming forward and peering out from under Fletcher's arm, "perhaps they'll tell *me* what they want. Who are you, little girl? Is it my mother you want? Will you give me your message?"

She looked more like a little princess than ever. She was dressed to go down to the drawing-room before dinner—all white embroidery and lace and rose-coloured ribbons. Floss and Carrots looked at her with a sort of dazzled admiration, mingled with shy bewilderment. It all seemed more of a mistake than ever—Sybil was evidently not expecting them—if only the railway station had not been so dreadfully far away, Floss felt as if she would have liked to take Carrots by the hand and go away back again, all the long weary way to Sandyshore!

But *Carrots'* faith in auntie and Sybil was unshaken—and his childlike confidence less susceptible of chill. Partly from mortification, partly to hide that she was crying, Floss stood perfectly silent, but Carrots pressed forward.

"It is Flossie and me, Sybil—don't you remember us? We've walked *such* a long way, and there was nobody to meet us at the station, and we are *so* cold and *so* hungry!"

Sybil gave a sort of leap into the air. "Floss and Carrots!" she cried, "oh mother, mother, come quick, here are Floss and Carrots!"

She seemed to fly across the hall in one second, and darting down a passage disappeared, crying out all the way, "Flossie and Carrots—oh, mother, mother, come."

And before the children had time to consider what they had best do, and *long* before the very deliberate Mr. Fletcher had collected his wits sufficiently to decide upon inviting them to come in, Sybil was back again, closely followed by her mother, whom she had dragged out of the drawing-room without any other explanation than her cry of "Floss and Carrots! Oh, mother, Flossie and Carrots."

And when Floss saw auntie running to them, with her kind face all eagerness and anxiety, the shyness and disappointment and the mortification all seemed suddenly to melt away. She rushed into the hall and threw herself sobbing into auntie's arms. "Oh, auntie," she cried, "we are *so* tired—poor Carrots is I mean,

and so hungry, and I thought you had forgotten us, and we're so far away from mamma."

Auntie understood all about it in a moment. She hugged Floss tight, and only let go of her for an instant to get hold of Carrots and hug him tight too. And then, when she saw the two tired little white faces, and felt how wet they were, and saw the tears on Floss's cheeks, she sat down on the hall floor, still clasping them tight, and actually cried too.

"My two poor dear little babes in the wood," she exclaimed. "What a dreadful mistake! What a cruel auntie you must have thought me!"

"I didn't know if you wanted us—I thought perhaps you had forgotten about us coming," whispered Floss.

"No wonder," said auntie; "but Flossie, darling, I haven't got any letter to say what day you were coming. That was why we were not at the station. Sybil and I had been making such delightful plans about how we should meet you at the station—do you think your father and mother could have forgotten to write to tell me the day?"

"Oh, no," said Floss, "I know papa wrote to tell you—he wrote the day before yesterday, for I heard him tell mamma so. And this morning when the post came, just as we were leaving, he wondered a little that there was no letter from you, but he said perhaps you hadn't thought it worth while to write, as you had said any day this week would do for us to come."

"Of course I would have written," said auntie; "but what can have become of the letter?"

It had evidently gone astray somehow, and that very evening the mystery was explained, for the postman brought it—a very travel-worn letter indeed, with two or three scrawls across it in red ink—"Missent to Whitehurst," "Try Whitefield," etc., etc.

"Whenever a letter does go wrong, which certainly is not very often, it is sure to be one of consequence," said auntie. But

long before the letter came Floss and Carrots had forgotten their troubles—at least if they hadn't it was not auntie's fault, for I can't tell you how kind she was and what a fuss she made about them. She took them up to Sybil's nice beautiful warm nursery, and all their wet things were taken off, and Floss was wrapped up in a dressing-gown of auntie's and Carrots in one of Sybil's, and then they had the most *lovely* tea you can imagine.

Sybil's father was away that night and was not coming back till the next day, and auntie was to have dinner alone, with Sybil beside her, you may be sure, to "keep her company," and help her to get through dinner by opening her little mouth for "tastes" every now and then. But auntie had to manage alone, after all, for of course Sybil would not leave Floss and Carrots, and auntie sent up the very nicest things from the dining-table for the children to eat with their tea, and Sybil did get some "tastes," I can assure you.

And they laughed at each other in the dressing-gowns, and Floss quite forgot that she had expected to feel shy and strange. Only when auntie came up to the nursery again after dinner and made Floss tell her all about the long walk in the cold and the dark, and about the "kind porter," and the oldish-looking lady, and, further back still, about the leaving home in the morning and how poor mamma kissed them "so many, many times"—Floss could not help crying again a little, nor could auntie either. And though Carrots and Sybil did not cry, their little faces looked very solemn and as if they almost thought they *should cry*, as they sat side by side on the rug in front of the high nursery guard, Carrots in the funny red-flannel dressing-gown which made him look so "old-fashioned," and Sybil in her white embroidery and rose ribbons, crumpling them all up "anyhow" in a way which really went to Floss's heart, though auntie did not seem to mind.

Then came bedtime. Such a nice bedtime, for auntie had prepared for them two dear little rooms, with a door between, that they should not feel far away from each other. And though

it was the very first time in Carrots' life that he had gone to bed without kind old nurse to tuck him up, he did not feel unhappy, for Floss reminded him what a good thing it was that their mother had nurse with her now she was ill, and besides, Sybil's French maid Denise was *very* kind and merry, and not at all "stuck up" or grand.

And the waking the next morning!

Who does not know those first wakings in a strange place! Sometimes so pleasant, sometimes *so* sad, but never, I think, without a strange interestingness of their own. This waking was pleasant, though so strange. The sun was shining for one thing —a great thing, I think I should call it, and the children felt it to be so.

They woke about the same time and called out to each other, and then Floss got out of bed and went to see how Carrots was looking, after all his adventures.

"You haven't caught cold, I hope, Carrots," she said in a motherly tone.

"Oh, no. I'm *quite* well," replied Carrots, "I haven't even a cold in my nose. And isn't it a nice morning, Floss, and isn't this a *lovely* room?"

"Yes," said Floss, "and so is mine, Carrots."

"And auntie *is* kind, isn't she, Floss?"

"Oh, *very*," said Floss.

"Isn't it nice to see the sun?" said Carrots. "Floss, I can't understand how it can always be the same sun, however far we go."

"But don't you remember what I showed you," said Floss, "about the world being like a little ball, always going round and round a great light, so *of course* the great light must always be the same?"

"Yes," said Carrots dreamily, "but still it seems funny. Will mamma see the sun at that nice warm place over the sea?"

"Why, of course," said Floss, "it's the sun that makes that place nice and warm."

"Is it?" said Carrots. "Is that place nearer the sun than Sandyshore is, Floss?"

"No, not exactly. At least it is in a sort of a way—the sunshine falls straighter on it, but I couldn't explain without a globe and a lot of fuss," said Floss. "Never mind just now, Carrots—perhaps auntie can show you."

"But Floss," persisted Carrots, "I do want to know one thing. Shall we see the sun in heaven?"

"No," said Floss decidedly, "*certainly* not. It says in the Bible there will be no sun or moon in heaven."

"Then I don't think I shall like it at all," said Carrots, "for there won't be any sea there either. I can't think *how* it can be a nice place."

"But, Carrots dear," said Floss in some distress, "you mustn't think of heaven that way. It isn't like that. Heaven isn't like a place exactly, mamma says. It is just being *quite* good."

"Being *quite* good," repeated Carrots thoughtfully. "I wish I could be quite good, Floss, I wish everybody could, don't you?"

"Yes," said Floss. "But really you must get up, Carrots dear; that will be good for just now. Being good always comes in little bits like that."

"But in heaven, the being good will be all in one great big piece, that's how it will be, isn't it?" said Carrots, as he got out of bed and began hunting for his slippers.

I cannot tell you half the history of that first day at Greenmays, or of many others that followed. They were very happy days, and they were full of so many new pleasures and interests for Carrots and Floss that I should really have to write another book to tell you all about them. Everybody was kind to the children, and everything that could be thought of to make them

feel "at home" was done. And Greenmays was such a pretty place—Carrots could hardly miss his dear old sea, once he had learnt to make friends with the hills. At first he could do nothing but gaze at them in astonishment.

"I didn't think hills were so big, or that they would have so many faces," he said to Floss and Sybil the first morning when they were out in the garden together.

Sybil burst out laughing. "Oh, you funny Carrots!" she said; "you're just like a boy in a fairy story—you've got such queer fancies."

"But they're *not* fancies, Sybil," said Carrots, gravely, turning his great brown eyes on his cousin. "The hills *have* got lots of different faces: that one up there, the one with the round knobby top, has looked *quite* different several times this morning. First it looked smiley and smooth, and then it got all cross and wrinkly, and *now* it looks as if it was going to sleep."

Sybil stared up at the hill he was pointing to. "I see what you mean," she said; "but it's only the shadows of the clouds."

"That's pretty," said Carrots: "who told you that, Sybil? I never thought of clouds having shadows."

"Nobody told me," said Sybil; "I finded it out my own self. I find out lots of things," she continued, importantly. "I dare say it's because of my name—papa says my name means I *should* find out things, like a sort of a fairy, you know."

"Does it?" said Carrots, in a rather awe-struck tone. "I should like that. When you were little, Sybil," he continued, "were you ever frightened of shadows? *I* was."

"No," said Sybil, "I only thought they were funny. And once papa told me a story of a shadow that ran away from its master. It went across the street, at night, you know, when the lamps were lighted: there were houses opposite, you see, and the shadow went into such a beautiful house, and wouldn't come back again!"

"And what after that?" said both Floss and Carrots in a breath.

"Oh, I can't tell it you all," said Sybil; "you must ask papa."

"Does he often tell you stories?" asked Floss.

"Bits," said Sybil; "he doesn't tell them all through, like mother. But he's very nice about answering things I ask him. He doesn't say 'you couldn't understand,' or 'you'll know when you're older,' that *horrid* way."

"He must be nice," said Floss, who had secretly been trembling a little at the thought of the strange uncle.

And he did turn out *very* nice. He was older than Floss had expected; a good deal older than auntie, whom he sometimes spoke to as if she were quite a little girl, in a way which amused the children very much. At first he seemed very quiet and grave, but after a while Floss found out that in his own way he was very fond of fun, and she confided to auntie that she thought he was the funniest person she had ever seen. I don't know if auntie told him this, or if he took it as a compliment, but certainly he could not have been offended, for every day, as they learnt to know him better, the children found him kinder and kinder.

So they were very happy at Greenmays, and no doubt would have gone on being so but for one thing. There came bad news of their mother.

This was how they heard it. Every week at least, for several weeks, Floss or Carrots, and sometimes both, got a letter from their mother or from Cecil and Louise; and at first these letters were so cheerful that even the little bit of anxiety which the children had hardly known was in their hearts melted away.

"What a *good* thing mamma went to that nice warm place, isn't it, auntie?" Carrots used to say after the arrival of each letter, and auntie most heartily agreed with the happy little fellow. But at last, just about Christmas time, when the thin foreign-looking letter, that the children had learnt to know

so well, made its appearance one morning on the breakfast-table, it proved to be for auntie—*that*, of course, they did not object to, had there been one for them too, but there was not!

“Auntie dear, there is no letter for us,” said Floss, when auntie came into the room. “Will you please open yours quick, and see if there is one inside it?”

“I don’t think there is,” said auntie; “it doesn’t feel like it.”

However, she opened the letter at once. No, there was no enclosure; and Floss, who was watching her face, saw that it grew troubled as she ran her eyes down the page.

“My letter is from your father. I cannot read it properly till after breakfast, for uncle is waiting for me to pour out his coffee. Run off now, dears, and I’ll come to the nursery and tell you all about it after breakfast,” she said, trying to look and speak just the same as usual.

But Floss saw that she was *trying*; she did not persist, however, but took Carrots by the hand, and went off obediently without speaking, only giving auntie one wistful look as she turned away.

“What’s wrong, Florence?” said Sybil’s father, as the door closed after the children.

“It is about Lucy,” said auntie; “she is much worse; *very* ill indeed. She has caught cold somehow, and Frank seems almost to have lost hope already.”

Two or three tears rolled down auntie’s face as she spoke. For a minute or two Sybil’s father said nothing.

“How about telling the children?” he asked at last.

“That’s just it,” replied auntie. “Frank leaves it to me to tell them or not, as I think best. He would not let Cecil or Louise write, as he thought if it had to be told I had better do so as gently as I could, by word of mouth. But they *must* be told—they are such quick children, I believe Floss suspects it already. And if—and if the next news should be *worse*,” continued auntie with a little sob, “I would never forgive myself for

not having prepared them, and they would be full of self-reproach for having been happy and merry as usual. Floss would say she should have known it by instinct."

"Would they feel it so much—could they realize it? They are so young," said Sybil's father.

Auntie shook her head. "Not too young to feel it terribly," she said. "It is much better to tell them. I could not hide the sorrow in my face from those two honest pairs of eyes, for one thing."

"Well, you know *oest*," said her husband.

A sad telling it was, and the way in which the children took it touched auntie's loving heart to the quick. They were so quiet and "pitiful," as little Sybil said. Floss's face grew white, for, with a child's hasty rush at conclusions, she fancied at first that auntie was paving the way for the worst news of all.

"Is mamma *dead*?" she whispered, and auntie's "Oh, no, no, darling. Not so bad as that," seemed to give her a sort of crumb of hope, even before she had heard all.

And Carrots stood beside auntie's knee, clasping his little mother Floss's hand tight, and looking up in auntie's face with those wonderful eyes of his, which auntie had said truly one could not deceive; and when he had been told all there was to tell, he just said softly, "Oh, *poor* mamma! Auntie, she kissed me so *many* times!"

And then, which auntie was on the whole glad of, the three children sat down on the rug together and cried; Sybil in her sympathy, as heartily as the others, while she kept kissing and petting them, and calling them by every endearing name she could think of.

"When will there be another letter, auntie?" said Floss.

"The day after to-morrow," said auntie. "Your father will write by every mail."

In her own heart auntie had not much hope. From what Captain Desart said, the anxiety was not likely to last long.

The illness had taken a different form from Mrs. Desart's other attacks. "She must be better or worse in a day or two," he wrote, and auntie's heart sorely misgave her as to which it would be.

The sorrowful day seemed very long to the children. They did their lessons as usual, for auntie told them it would be much better to do so.

"Would it please mamma?" said Carrots; and when auntie said "Yes, she was quite sure it would," he got his books at once, and "tried" even harder than usual.

But after lessons they had no heart to play, and there was no "must" about that. By bedtime they all looked worn out with crying and the sort of strange excitement there is about great sorrows—above all to children—which is more exhausting than almost anything.

"This will never do," thought auntie. "Hugh" (that was the name of Sybil's father) "will have reason to think I should have taken his advice, and not told them, if they go on like this."

"Sybil," she said, "Floss and Carrots will make themselves ill before the next letter comes. What can we do for them?"

Sybil shook her head despondently.

"I don't know, mother dear," she said; "I've got out all my best things to please them, but it's no good." She stood still for a minute, then her face lightened up. "Mother," she said, "aposing you were to read aloud some of those stories you're going to get bounded up into a book some day? They would like *that*."

Floss hardly felt as if she would care to hear *any* stories, however pretty. But she did not like to disappoint kind auntie by saying so, especially when auntie told her she really wanted to know if she and Carrots liked her stories, as it would help her to judge if other children would care for them when they were "bounded up into a book."

So the next day auntie read them some, and they talked

them over and got quite interested in them. Fortunately, she did not read them all that day, for the next day there was still more need of something to distract the children's sorrowful thoughts, as the looked-for letter did not come. Auntie would have liked to cheer the children by reminding them of the old sayings that "No news is good news," and "It is ill news which flies fast," but she dared not, for her own heart was very heavy with anxiety. And she was very glad to see them interested in the rest of the stories for the time.

I cannot tell you these stories, but some day perhaps you may come across the little book which they were made into. But there is one of them which I should like to tell you, as it is not very long, and in the children's mind it was always associated with something that happened just as auntie had finished reading it. For it was the last of her little stories, and it was called—

CHAPTER XII

"THE TWO FUNNY LITTLE TROTS"

"Like to a double cherry."

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

"**O**H, mamma," cried I, from the window by which I was standing, to my mother who was working by the fire, "*do* come here and look at these two funny little trots."

Aunties had read only this first sentence of her story when Sybil interrupted her.

"Mother dear," she said, in her prim little way, "before you begin, do tell us one thing. Does the story end sadly?"

Auntie smiled. "You should have asked me before I *had* begun, Sybil," she said. "But never mind now. I don't really think I can tell you if it ends sadly or not. It would be like telling you the end at the beginning, and it would spoil the interest, if you understand what that means."

"Very well," said Sybil, resignedly, "then I suppose I must wait. But I won't like it if it ends badly, mother, and Floss won't, and Carrots won't. Will you, Floss and Carrots?"

"I don't think Floss and Carrots can say, till they've heard it," said auntie. "Now, Sybil, you musn't interrupt any more. Where was I? Oh, yes"]—"do come and look at these two funny little trots."

'My mother got up from her seat and came to the window. She could not help smiling when she saw the little couple I pointed out to her.

'"Aren't they a pair of fat darlings?" I said. "I wonder if they live in our terrace?"'

'We knew very little of our neighbors, though we were not living in London, for we had only just come to St. Austin's. We had come there to spend the winter, as it was a mild and sheltered place, for I, then a girl of sixteen, had been in delicate health for some time.' ["You wouldn't believe it to see me now, would you?" said auntie, looking up at the children with a smile on her pretty young-looking face, but it was quite true, all the same.] 'I was my mother's only girl,' she went on, turning to her manuscript again, 'and she was a widow, so you can fancy what a pet I was. My big brothers were already all out in the world, in the navy, or the army, or at college, and my mother and I generally lived by ourselves in a country village much farther north than St. Austin's, and it was quite an event to us to leave our own home for several months and settle ourselves down in lodgings in a strange place.

'It seemed a very strange place to us, for we had not a single friend or acquaintance in it, and at home in our village we knew everybody, and everybody knew us, from the clergyman down to farmer Grinthwait's sheep-dog, and nothing happened without our knowing it. I suppose I was naturally of rather a sociable turn. I knew my mother used sometimes in fun to call me "a little gossip," and I really very much missed the

sight of the accustomed friendly faces. We had been two days at St. Austin's, and I had spent most of those two days at the window, declaring to my mother that I should not feel so "strange" if I got to know some of our neighbours by sight, if nothing more.

'But hitherto I had hardly succeeded even in this. There did not seem to be any "neighbours" in the passers-by; they were just passers-by who never seemed to pass by again, and without anything particular to distinguish them if they did. For St. Austin's was a busy little place, and our house was on the South Esplanade, the favourite "promenade" for the visitors, none of whom, gentlemen, ladies, or children, had particularly attracted me till the morning I first caught sight of my funny little trots.

'I do think they would have attracted any one—any one certainly that loved children. I fancy I see them now, the two dears, coming slowly and solemnly along, each with a hand of their nurse, pulling *well* back from her, as if the effort to keep up, even with her deliberate rate of walking, was almost too much for their fat little legs. They looked exactly the same size, and were alike in everything, from their dresses—which this first day were brown holland, very easy about the bodies, very short and bunchy about the skirts—to the two white woolly lambs, clasped manfully by each in his or her disengaged hand. Whether they were boys or girls I could not tell in the least, and to this day I do not know.

"*"Aren't they darlings, mamma?"* I said.

"*"They certainly are two funny little trots,"* she replied with a smile, using my own expression.

'Mamma went back to her knitting, but I stayed by the window, watching my new friends. They passed slowly up the Esplanade, my eyes following them till they were out of sight, and then I turned away regretfully.

"*"They are sure not to pass again,"* I said, "and they are so nice."

“‘If they live near here, very likely the Esplanade is their daily walk, and they will be passing back again in a few minutes,’ said my mother, entering into my fancy.

I took up her suggestion eagerly. She was right: in about a quarter of an hour my trots appeared again, this time from the other direction, and, as good luck would have it, just opposite our window, their nurse happening to meet an acquaintance, they came to a halt!

“‘Mamma, mamma,’ I exclaimed, ‘here they are again!’”

Mamma nodded her head and smiled without looking up. She was just then counting the rows of her knitting, and was afraid of losing the number. I pressed my face close to the window—if only the trots would look my way!—I could hardly resist tapping on the pane.

‘Suddenly a bright thought struck me. I seized Gip, my little dog, who was asleep on the hearth-rug, and held him up to the window.

“‘T’ss, Gip; T’ss, cat. At her; at her,’ I exclaimed.

Poor Gip had doubtless been having delightful dreams—it was very hard on him to be waked up so startlingly. He blinked his eyes and tried to see the imaginary cat—no doubt he thought it was his own fault he did not succeed, for he was the most humble-minded and unpresuming of little dogs, and his faith in me was unbounded. He could not see a cat, but he took it for granted that I did; so he set to work barking vigorously. That was just what I wanted. The trots heard the noise and both turned round; then they let go of their nurse’s hands and made a little journey round her skirt till they met.

“‘Dot,’ said one, “pretty doggie.”

“‘Doll,’ said the other, both speaking at once, you understand, “pretty doggie.”

‘I don’t mean to say that I *heard* what they said, I only *saw* it. But afterwards, when I had heard their voices, I felt

sure that was what they had said, for they almost always spoke together.

Then they joined their disengaged hands (the outside hand of each still clasping its woolly lamb), and there they stood, legs well apart, little mouths and eyes wide open, staring with the greatest interest and solemnity at Gip and me. At Gip, of course, far more than at me. Gip was a dog, *I* was only a girl!—quite a middle-aged person, no doubt, the trots thought me, if they thought about me at all; perhaps they did a little, as *I* was Gip's owner; for *I* was sixteen, and they could not have been much more than three.

'But all this time they were so solemn. *I* wanted to make them laugh. There was a little table in the window—a bow window, of course, as it was at the sea-side, and certain to catch winds from every quarter of the heavens—upon which *I* mounted Gip, and set to work putting him through his tricks. *I* made him perform "ready, present, *fire*," with a leap to catch the bit of biscuit on his nose. *I* made him "beg," "lie dead," like Mother Hubbard's immortal pet, and do everything a well-educated dog could be expected to do. And, oh, how funny it was to watch the trots! Evidently they had never seen anything of the kind before; they stared at first as if they could hardly believe their eyes, and then they smiled, and, *at last*, they laughed. How prettily they laughed—they looked more like two fat cherubs than ever.

'But their laughing attracted their maid's attention. She too turned round, and *I* was pleased to see that she had a pleasant, pretty young face. "I shouldn't have liked those dear trots to have a cross old nurse," *I* said to myself, and the maid still further raised herself in my good opinion by laughing and smiling too. In a minute or two when she thought "that was enough for to-day," she stooped and whispered to the trots and they immediately lifted their little hands, the right of one, the left of the other—for *nothing*, you see, could have persuaded them to let go of

their precious lambs—to their rosy mouths and blew a kiss to me, and I could *see* them say, “Zank zou, lady; zank zou, doggie.”

‘You may be sure I kissed my hand to them in return, and off they toddled, each with a hand of “Bessie,” as I afterwards heard them call their maid, and hauling back manfully as before, which gave Bessie the look of a very large steam-tug convoying two very little vessels.

‘I watched them till they were quite out of sight. Then I turned to my mother.

“‘I have made two friends here anyway, mamma,’ I said. “The trots are sure to stop every time they pass. It will be something to watch for.”

‘Mamma smiled. She was pleased to see *me* pleased and interested, for she had been beginning to fear that the dulness and strangeness of our new life would prevent St. Austin’s doing me as much good as she had hoped.

“‘To-morrow, dear,’ she said, “if it is fine, I hope you will be able to go a little walk, and we’ll look out for your little friends.”

‘It was fine the next day, and we did go out, and we did meet the trots!

‘They caught sight of me (of Gip, rather, I should perhaps say) and I of them, just about the same moment. I saw them tug their nurse, and when they got close up to me they stopped short. It was no use Bessie’s trying to get them on; there they stood resolutely, till the poor girl’s face grew red, and she looked quite ashamed. Gip, who I must say, had a wonderful amount of tact, ran up to them with a friendly little bark. Bessie let go the trots’ hands and stooped to stroke him.

“‘He won’t bite, miss, will he?’ she said gently, looking up at me.

“‘Oh, dear, no,’ I said, and the trots, smiling with delight, stooped—not that they had so very far to stoop—to stroke him too.

"Pretty doggie," said Doll.

"Pretty doggie," said Dot.

"Then they held up their dear little mouths to kiss me. "Zank zou, lady," they said, and each taking a hand of Bessie again, they proceeded on their way.

'After that day, not many passed without my seeing them, and talking to them, and making Gip show off his tricks. Sometimes our meetings were at the window, sometimes on the road; once or twice, when there came some unusually fine mild days, mamma let me sit out on the shore, and I taught the trots to dig a hole for Gip and bury him in the sand, all but his bright eyes and funny black nose—that *was* a beautiful game! I never found out exactly where my friends lived; it was in one of the side streets leading on to the Esplanade, that was all I knew. I never knew, as I said, if they were boys or girls, or perhaps one of each. Mamma wanted one day to ask Bessie, but I wouldn't let her. They were just my two little trots. that was all I wanted to know.

"It would spoil them to fancy them growing up into great boys or girls," I said. "I want them to be always trots—nothing else."

'And as Bessie called them simply Doll and Dot, without any "master" or "miss," I was able to keep my fancy.

'When the weather grew colder, the trots came out in a new costume—sealskin coats, sealskin caps, and sealskin gloves—they were just little balls of sealskin, and looked "trottier" than ever. About this time they left off carrying their woolly lambs. I suspect the real reason was that their extreme affection for the lambs had resulted in these favoured animals growing more black than white, and that Bessie judged them unfit for appearing in public, but if this *was* the case, evidently Bessie had been obliged to resort to artifice to obtain their owners' consent to the lambs being left at home. For, when I asked the trots where

the precious creatures were, they looked melancholy and distressed and shook their heads.

““Too told!” said Doll, and Dot repeated, like a mournful echo, “too told!”

““Of course,” said I, “how stupid of me not to think of it! of course it’s far too cold for such very little lambs to be out.”

‘Bessie looked gratefully at me. “We’re going to buy some cakes for tea,” she said, with a smile, and sure enough in about half an hour the trio appeared again, and came to a standstill as usual, opposite our window. And, instead of a lamb, each trot hugged a little parcel, neatly done up in white paper. I opened the window to hear what they were saying, they looked so excited.

““Takes for tea,” they both called out at once, “takes for tea. Lady have one. Dip have one.”

‘And poor Bessie was obliged to open the parcels, and extract one “take” from each and hand them up to me, before my little dears would be satisfied.

‘Can you fancy that I really got to love the trots? I did not want to know who they were, or what sort of a father and mother they had—they were well taken care of, that was evident, for somehow, knowing anything more about them would have spoilt them for being my funny little trots.

‘But, for several weeks of the three months we spent at St. Austin’s, the sight of these happy little creatures was one of my greatest pleasures, and a day without a glimpse of them would have seemed blank and dull.

‘There came a time, however, when for many days I did not see my little friends. The weather was bad just then, and mamma said she was sure they had got colds, that would be all that was wrong with them, but somehow I felt uneasy. I asked our doctor, when he called, if there was much illness about, and he, fancying I was nervous on my own account replied, “Oh, no, with the exception of two or three cases of croup, he had no

serious ailments among his patients: it was a very healthy season."

"I got frightened at the idea of croup, and cross-questioned him to discover if my trots were among the sufferers, but he shook his head. All his little patients were mere infants; he did not even know the trots by sight.

"Then mamma suggested another very reasonable explanation of their disappearance.

"They have probably left St. Austin's," she said. "Many people come here for only the *very* worst of the winter, and that is about over now."

"But even this did not satisfy me. I was certain something was wrong with Doll and Dot, and I wasted, I should be ashamed to say how many hours, gazing out of the window in hopes of catching sight of the familiar little figures.

'At last, one day, when I had almost left off hoping ever to see them again, suddenly, *two* figures appeared on the Esplanade, a stone's throw from our window.

'Who were they? Could it be—yes, it must be *one* of the trots, led by, not Bessie, no, this maid was a stranger. Where could Bessie be? And oh, where was my other little trot? For, even at some yards' distance, I saw something sadly different in the appearance of the one little figure, slowly coming along in our direction. It was dressed—hat, coat, gloves, socks and all—it was dressed in deep mourning.

'I seized my hat and rushed out to meet them. Mamma thought I was going out of my mind I believe. When I found myself out in the open air, I tried to control myself and look like the rest of the people walking quietly along, though my heart was beating violently, and I felt as if I could not speak without crying. But when I got up to the one little trot and its attendant, the sight of her strange face composed me. She was so different from Bessie—old and stiff and prim-looking. I stooped to kiss the child, Dot or Doll, I knew not which. "How are you, darling?" I said, "And where is—" I stopped short.

“The trot looked up in my face.

““Oh, lady,” it said, “Dot is all alone. Doll is done to ‘Ebben,’ and the great tears gathered in Dot’s mournful eyes and rolled down Dot’s rosy cheeks.

““Hush, hush, my dear. You mustn’t cry. You’ll make yourself ill if you cry any more,” said the hard-looking nurse.

‘A moment before, I had intended turning to her and asking for some particulars of the baby’s sad words, but now I felt I *could* not. She was so stiff and unsympathising. I could not bear her to see me, a stranger, crying about what I had heard. Besides, what good would it do? Why should I hear any more? I shrank from doing so. The bare fact was enough. I just bent down and kissed the solitary darling.

““Good-bye, my trot,” I said. I could not say another word.

““Dood-bye, don’t ky,” said Dot, stroking my cheek. “Doll won’t tum back, but Dot will do to ‘Ebben too some day.”

That was quite too much for me. I turned away and hurried back home as fast as I could.

““Mamma,” I exclaimed, rushing into our sitting-room, and throwing myself down on the sofa, “it’s just what I thought. I wish you would come away from St. Austin’s at once. I shall never, never like it again.”

““What *is* the matter, Florence?” said poor mamma, quite startled.

““It’s about the trots,” I said, now fairly sobbing, “I have just seen one—in deep mourning, mamma,—and—and—the other one is *dead*.”

““Poor little angel!” said mamma. And the tears came into her eyes too.

‘I did not see Dot again after that day. I fancy that was its last walk before leaving St. Austin’s for its regular home, wherever that was. And a very short time after, we ourselves left too.

‘I never forgot the trots. Of course the pleasure of going back to our own dear home again, and seeing all our old friends, raised my spirits, and softened the real grief I had felt. But whenever we spoke of St. Austin’s, or people asked me about it, and mentioned the Esplanade or the shore, or any of the places where I had seen the trots, the tears *would* come into my eyes, as again I seemed to see before me the two dear funny little figures. And whenever our plans for the following winter were alluded to, I always said one thing: “Wherever you go, mamma, don’t go to St. Austin’s.”

‘My mother gave in to me. When did she not? How patient she was with me, how sympathising, even in my fancies! And how unselfish—it was not till long after we had left St. Austin’s, that she told me what anxiety she had gone through on hearing of my having kissed Dot. For how sadly probable it seemed that Doll had died of some infectious illness, such as scarlet-fever, for instance, which I had never had!

‘“But *Dot* couldn’t have been ill, mamma,” I said. “*Dot* looked perfectly well.”

‘“Did he?” said my mother. Sometimes she called the trots “he” and sometimes “she,” in the funniest way! “I wonder what the other little dear died of?”

‘“So do I,” I replied. “Still, on the whole, I think I am just as well pleased not to know.”

‘Our uncertainty for the next winter ended in what was to me a delightful decision. We determined to go to the South of France. I could amuse you children by a description of our journey—journeys in those days really were much more amusing than now; but I must hasten on to the end of my story. We had fixed upon Pau as our headquarters, and we arrived there early in November. What a different thing from our November at home! I could hardly believe it *was* November; it would have seemed to me far less wonderful to have been told I had been asleep for six months, and that really it was May, and not

November at all, than to have awokened as I did, that first morning after our arrival, and to have seen out of the window the lovely sunshine and bright blue sky, and summer-look of warmth, and comfort, and radiance!

'We had gone to an hotel for a few days, intending to look out for a little house, or *apartement* (which, children, does not mean the same thing as our English lodgings by any means), at our leisure. Your grandmother was not rich, and the coming so far cost a great deal. The hotel we had been recommended to was a very comfortable one though not one of the most fashionable, and the landlord was very civil, as some friend who had stayed with him the year before had written about our coming. He showed us our rooms himself, and hoped we should like them, and then he turned back to say he trusted we should not be disturbed by the voices of some children in the next "salon." He would not have risked it, he said, had he been able to help it, but there were no other rooms vacant, and the family with the children were leaving the next day. Not that they were noisy children by any means; they were very *chers petits*, but there *were* ladies, to whom the very name of children in their vicinity was—here the landlord held up his hands and made a grimace!

"‘Then they must be old maids!’ I said, laughing, ‘which mamma and I are not. We love children,’ at which Mr. Landlord bowed and smiled, and said something complimentary about mademoiselle being so “*aimable*.”

I listened for the children’s voices that evening, and once or twice I heard their clear merry tones. But as for any “disturbance,” one might as well have complained of a cuckoo in the distance, as of anything we heard of our little neighbours. We did not see them; only once, as I was running along the passage, I caught a glimpse at the other end of a little pinafored figure led by a nurse, disappearing through a doorway. I did not see its face; in fact the glimpse was of the hastiest. Yet *something* about the wee figure, a certain round-about bunchiness, and

a sort of pulling back from the maid, as she went into the room, recalled vaguely to my heart, rather than to my mind, two little toddling creatures, that far away across the sea I had learnt to love and look for. When I went into our room, there were tears in my eyes, and when mamma asked me the reason, I told her that I had seen a child that somehow had reminded me of my two little trots.

"Poor little trots," said mamma. "I wonder if the one that was left still misses the other?"

'But that was all we said about them.

The next morning I was in a fever to go out and see all that was to be seen. I dragged poor mamma into all the churches, and half the shops, and would have had her all through the castle too, but that she declared she could do no more. So we came to a halt at the great "*Place*," and sat down on a nice shady seat to watch the people, I consoling myself with the reflection that, as we were to be four months at Pau, there was still a *little* time left for sight-seeing.

'It was very amusing. There were people of all nations—*children* of all nations, little French boys and girls, prettily but simply dressed, some chatting merrily, some walking primly beside their white-capped *bonnes*; little Russians, looking rather grand, but not *so* grand as their nurses in their rich costumes of bright scarlet and blue, embroidered in gold; some Americans, and a few unmistakable English. We amused ourselves by guessing the nationality of all these little people.

"*Those* are Italians or Spaniards, mamma, look what dark eyes they have, and *those* are—" I suddenly stopped. "Oh, mamma!" I exclaimed, and when she looked at me, she saw I had grown quite pale, and in another moment, seeing to what I was pointing, she understood the reason. There, right before us, coming slowly up the middle of the Place, Bessie in the middle, each child with a hand of hers tugging back manfully in the old

way, each, yes, *really*, each under the other arm hugging a woolly lamb, came the two funny little trots!

‘I felt at first as if I were dreaming. *Could* it be the trots? I sat still in a half stupid way, staring, but Gip—I was forgetting to tell you that *of course* Gip had come with us to Pau—Gip had far more presence of mind than I. He did not stop to wonder *how* it could be the trots, he was simply satisfied that it *was* the trots, and forward he darted, leaping, barking furiously, wagging his tail, giving every sort of welcome in dog language, that he could think of.

“‘Dip, Dip; see Bessie, here is a doggie like Dip,’ said one trot.

“‘Dip, Dip, pretty Dip,’ said the other.

‘The sound of their voices seemed to bring back my common sense. They *were* my own dear trots. “‘Dip, Dip” would have satisfied me, even if I had not seen them. The trots *never* could manage the letter “G”! I flew forward, and kneeling down on the ground, little caring how I soiled my nice new dress, or what the people on the Place thought of me, I regularly hugged my two pets.

“‘Here is Dip’s kind lady too,’ they both said at once, smiling and happy, but not by any means particularly surprised to see me. I looked up at Bessie at last, and held out my hand. She shook it heartily.

“‘I *am* pleased to see you again, miss, to be sure; who would have thought it?’ she said. “And they haven’t forgot you, haven’t Doll and Dot. They are always speaking of Gip and you, miss.”

“‘But, Bessie,’ I began, and then I hesitated. How could I tell her what I had thought? “How was it you left St. Austin’s so suddenly?”—the trots were not in mourning now, they were prettily dressed in dark blue sailor serge, as bunchy as ever.

‘Bessie thought for a minute.

“‘Let me see,’ she said, “oh, yes, I remember! We did

leave suddenly. My mistress's father died, and she was sent for off to Edinburgh, and she took Doll and me, and left Dot to keep her papa company. Master said he'd be lost without one of them, and he couldn't get off to Edinburgh for a fortnight after us. But we'll never try *that* again, miss. Dot did nothing but cry for Doll, and Doll for Dot. Dot, so Martha the housemaid said, was always saying, 'Doll's done to 'Ebben,' till it was pitiful to hear, and Dot was just as bad in Edinburgh about Doll."

"But Dot *did* do to 'Ebben,'" said Doll, who as well as Dot was listening to what Bessie was saying. "And then Doll tummed to 'Ebben too," said Dot, "and then 'Ebben was nice."

I kissed the pets again, partly to prevent Bessie seeing the tears in my eyes. I understood it all now, without asking any more, and Bessie never knew what it was I *had* thought.

'Only you can fancy how sorry I was to find the trots were leaving Pau that very afternoon! They were the children whose dear little voices I had heard through the wall, who the landlord had feared might disturb us! They were going on to Italy for the winter.

"If only I had known last night who they were," I said to mamma regretfully.

'Mamma, however, was always wise. "Think rather," she said, "how very glad you should be to know it this morning. And who can tell but what some time or other you may see the trots again."

'But I never did!"

CHAPTER XIII

GOOD ENDINGS

But I lost my happy childhood.
* * * * *

It slipped from me you shall know,
It was in the dewy alleys
Of the land of long ago.
* * * * *

Not in sadness,
Nor reproach, these words I say,
God is good, and gives new gladness,
When the old he takes away.

"You never did? Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Sybil. "You really never, never did, mother?"

Auntie looked rather "funny," as the children call it.

"As trots I never saw them again," she said, "and at the time I wrote out that story I had not seen them again at all."

"But you've seen them since," cried all the three children at once, "you've seen them since they've grown big. Oh, auntie, oh, mother, do tell us."

"I couldn't just now, truly I couldn't," said auntie, "it would lead me into another story which isn't written yet. All that I know about 'the two funny little trots' I have told you. Do you like it?"

"Awfully," said Sybil.

"Very much," said Floss.

"It's lovely," said Carrots.

Auntie smiled at the children. They looked so pleased and interested, it was evident that for the time they had forgotten their sorrow and anxiety. Suddenly, just as she was thinking sadly how soon it must return to their minds, there came a loud ring at the bell. They all started, they had been sitting so quietly.

"It must be the post," said Sybil. Auntie had thought so

too, but had not said it, as it was very unlikely this post would bring any letter from Captain Desart.

It did however! Fletcher appeared with one in another minute; the thin large envelope, and the black, rather scrawly writing that Floss and Carrots knew so well. It would have been no use trying to conceal it from them, so auntie opened it quietly, though her fingers trembled as she did so. She read it very quickly, it was not a long letter, and then she looked up with the tears in her eyes. "Children, dear children," she said, "it *is* good news. Your dear mother is a little better, and they have good hopes of her."

Oh how glad they were! They kissed auntie and Sybil and each other, and it seemed as if a great heavy stone had been lifted off their hearts. There was still of course reason for *anxiety*, but there was hope, "good hope," wrote Captain Desart, and what does not that mean? Auntie felt so hopeful herself that she could not find it in her heart to check the children for being so.

"It is because you made the story of the trots end nicely that that nice letter came," said Sybil, and nothing that her mother could say would persuade her that *she* had nothing to do with the ending, that she had just told it as it really happened!

I am telling you the story of Floss and Carrots as it really happened too, and I am so glad that it—the story of this part of their young lives, that is to say—ends happily too. Their mother did get better, wonderfully better, and was able to come back to England in the spring, looking stronger than for many years. To England, but not to Sandyshore. Captain Desart got another appointment much farther south, where the climate was milder and better and the winters not to be dreaded for a delicate person. So they all left the Cove House!

Their new home was of course by the sea too, but Carrots never would allow that it was the same sea. His own old sea

stayed behind at Sandyshore, though if he were to go to look for it there now I doubt if he would find it. When old friends once get away into the country of long ago, they are hard to find again—we learn to doubt if they are to be found anywhere except in their own corners of our memory.

And it is long ago now since the days when Carrots and his dear Floss ran races on the sands and made “plans” together. Long ago, in so far that you would not be able *anywhere* to find these children whom I loved so much, and whom I have told you a little about. You would, at least I *hope* you would, like to know what became of them, how they grew up, and what Carrots did when he got to be a man. But this I cannot now tell you, for my little book is long enough—I only hope you are not tired of it—only I may tell you one thing. If any of you know a very good, kind, gentle, brave man—so good that he cannot but be kind; so brave that he cannot but be gentle, I should like you to think that, perhaps, whatever he is—clergyman, doctor, soldier, sailor, it doesn’t matter in the least—*perhaps* when that man was a boy, he was my little Carrots. Especially if he has large “doggy-looking,” brown eyes, and hair that once *might* have been called “red.”

MARY ANN JOLLY

“But I lost my poor little doll, dears,
As I played in the heath one day;
And I cried for her more than a week, dears”—

* * * * *

THEY say that the world—and of course that means the people in it—has changed very much in the last half century or so. I dare say in some ways this is true, but it is not in all. There are some ways in which I hope and think people will never change much. Hearts will never change, I hope—good, kind hearts who love and trust each other I mean; and little children, they surely will always be found the same,—simple and faithful, happy and honest; why, the very word *childlike* would cease to have any meaning were the natures it describes to alter.

Looking back over more than fifty years to a child life then, far away from here, flowing peacefully on, I recognise the same nature, the same innocent, unsuspicuous enjoyment, the same quaint, so-called “old-fashioned” ways that now-a-days I find in the children growing up about me. The little ones of to-day enjoy a *shorter* childhood, there is more haste to hurry them forward in the race—we would almost seem to begrudge them their playtime—but that I think is the only real difference. My darlings are children after all; they love the sunshine and the flowers, mud-pies and mischief, dolls and story-books, as fervently as ever. And long may they do so!

My child of fifty years ago was in all essentials a real child. Yet again, in some particulars, she was exceptional, and exceptionally placed. She had never travelled fifty miles from

her home, and that home was far away in the country, in Scotland. And a Scottish country home in those days was far removed from the bustle and turmoil and excitement of the great haunts of men. Am I getting beyond you, children dear? Am I using words and thinking thoughts you can scarcely follow? Well, I won't forget again. I will tell you my simple story in simple words.

This long-ago little girl was named Janet. She was the youngest of several brothers and sisters, some of whom, when she was born even, were already out in the world. They were, on the whole, a happy, united family; they had their troubles, and disagreements perhaps too, sometimes, but in one thing they all joined, and that was in loving and petting little Janet. How well she remembers even now, all across the long half century, how the big brothers would dispute as to which of them should carry her in her flowered chintz dressing-gown, perched like a tiny queen on their shoulders, to father's and mother's room to say good-morning; how on Hallowe'en the rosiest apples and finest nuts were for "wee Janet"; how the big sisters would work for hours at her dolls' clothes; how, dearest memory of all, the kind, often careworn, studious father would read aloud to her, hour after hour, as she lay on the hearth-rug, coiled up at his feet.

For little Janet could not read much to herself. She was not blind, but her sight was imperfect, and unless the greatest care had been taken she might, by the time she grew up, have lost it altogether. To look at her you would not have known there was anything wrong with her blue eyes; the injury was the result of an accident in her infancy, by which one of the delicate sight nerves had been hurt, though not so as to prevent the hope of cure. But for several years she was hardly allowed to use her eyes at all. She used to wear a shade whenever she was in a bright light, and she was forbidden to read, or to sew, or to do anything which called for much seeing. How she learnt

to read I do not know—I do not think she could have told you herself—but still it is certain that she did learn; perhaps her kind father taught her this, and many more things than either he or she suspected in the long hours she used to lie by his study fire, sometimes talking to him in the intervals of his writing, sometimes listening with intense eagerness to the legends and ballads his heart delighted in, sometimes only making stories to herself as she sat on the hearth-rug playing with her dolls.

There are many quaint little stories of this long-ago maiden that you would like to hear, I think. One comes back to my mind as I write. It is about a mysterious holly bush in the garden of Janet's home, which one year took it into its head to grow all on one side, in the queerest way you ever saw. This holly bush stood in a rather conspicuous position, just outside the breakfast-room window, and Janet's father was struck by the peculiar crookedness which afflicted it, and one morning he went out to examine it more closely. He soon found the reason—the main branch had been stunted by half an orange skin, which had been fitted upon it most neatly and closely, like a cap, just where it was sprouting most vigorously. Janet's father was greatly surprised. "Dear me, dear me," he exclaimed as he came in, "what a curious thing. How could this ever have got on to the holly bush? An old orange skin, you see," he went on, holding it up to the assembled family party. Little Janet was there, in her usual place by her father's chair.

"Was it on the robin's bush, father?" She asked.

"The robin's bush, Janet? What do you mean?"

"The bush the wee robin perches on when he comes to sing in the morning," she answered readily. "A long, long time ago, I tied an orange skin on, to make a soft place for the dear robin's feet. The bush was so prickly, I could not bear to see him stand upon it."

And to this day the crooked holly bush tells of the little child's tenderness.

Then there is another old story of Janet, how, once being sorely troubled with toothache, and anxious to bear it uncomplainingly "like a woman," she was found, after being searched for everywhere, fast asleep in the "byre," her little cheek pillow'd on the soft skin of a few days' old calf. "Its breath was so sweet, and it felt so soft and warm, it seemed to take the ache away," she said.

And another old memory of little Janet on a visit at an uncle's, put to sleep in a room alone, and feeling frightened by a sudden gale of wind that rose in the night, howling among the trees and sweeping down the hills. Poor little Janet! It seemed to her she was far, far away from everybody, and the wind, as it were, took mortal form and voice, and threatened her, till she could bear it no longer. Up she got, all in the dark, and wandered away down the stairs and passages of the rambling old house, till at last a faint glimmer of light led her to a modest little room in the neighbourhood of the kitchen, where old Jamie, the faithful serving-man, who had seen pass away more than one generation of the family he was devoted to, was sitting up reading his Bible before going to bed. How well Janet remembers it even now! The old man's start of surprise at the unexpected apparition of wee missy, how he took her on his knee and turned over the pages of "the Book," to read to her words of gentle comfort, even for a little child's alarm; how Jesus hushed the winds and waves, and bade them be still; how not a hair of the head of even tiny Janet could be injured without the Father's knowledge; how she had indeed no reason to fear; till, soothed and reassured, the child let the good old man lead her back to bed again, where she slept soundly till morning.

But all this time I am very long of introducing to you, the real heroine of this story—not Janet, but who then? Janet's dearest and most tenderly prized doll—"Mary Ann Jolly."

She was one of several, but the best loved of all, though

why it would have been difficult to say. She was certainly not pretty; indeed, to tell the truth, I fear I must own that she was decidedly ugly. And an ugly doll in those days *was* an ugly doll, my dears. For whether little girls have altered much or not since the days of Janet's childhood, there can be no two opinions about dolls; *they* have altered tremendously and undoubtedly for the better. There were what people *thought* very pretty dolls then, and Janet possessed two or three of these. There was "Lady Lucy Manners," an elegant blonde, with flaxen ringlets and pink kid hands and arms; there was "Master Ronald," a gallant sailor laddie, with crisp black curls and goggle bead eyes; there were two or three others—Arabellas or Clarissas, I cannot tell you their exact names; on the whole, for that time, Janet had a goodly array of dolls. But still, dearest of all was Mary Ann Jolly. I think her faithfulness, her thorough reliableness, must have been her charm; she never melted, wept tears of wax—that is to say, to the detriment of her complexion, when placed too near the nursery fire. She never broke an artery and collapsed through loss of sawdust. These weaknesses were not at all in her way, for she was of wood, wooden. Her features were oil-painted on her face, like the figure-head of a ship, and would stand washing. Her hair was a good honest black-silk wig, with sewn-on curls, and the whole affair could be removed at pleasure; but oh, my dear children, she was ugly. Where she had come from originally I cannot say. I feel almost sure it was from no authorised doll manufactory. I rather think she was home-made to some extent, and I consider it highly probable that her beautiful features were the production of the village painter. But none of these trifling details are of consequence; wherever she had come from, whatever her origin, she was herself—good, faithful Mary Ann Jolly.

One summer time there came trouble to the neighbourhood where little Janet's home was. A fever of some kind broke out

in several villages, and its victims were principally children. For the elder ones of the family—such of them, that is to say, as were at home—but little fear was felt by their parents; but for Janet and the brother next to her, Hughie, only three years older than she, they were anxious and uneasy. Hughie was taken from the school, a few miles distant, to which every day he used to ride on his little rough pony, and for the time Janet and he were allowed to run wild. They spent the long sunny days, for it was the height of summer, in the woods or on the hills, as happy as two young fawns, thinking, in their innocence, “the fever”—to them but the name of an unknown and unrealisable possibility—rather a lucky thing than otherwise.

And Hughie was a trusty guardian for his delicate little sister. He was a brave and manly little fellow; awkward and shy to strangers, but honest as the day, and with plenty of mother-wit about him. Janet looked up to him with affection and admiration not altogether unmixed with awe. Hughie was great at “knowing best,” in their childish perplexities, and, for all his tenderness, somewhat impatient of “want of sense,” or thoughtlessness.

One day the two children, accompanied as usual by Hughie’s dog “Cæsar,” and the no less faithful Mary Ann Jolly, had wandered farther than their wont from home. Janet had set her heart on some beautiful water forget-me-nots, which, in a rash moment, Hughie had told her that he had seen growing on the banks of a little stream that flowed through a sort of gorge between the hills. It was quite three miles from home—a long walk for Janet, but Hughie knew his way perfectly—he was not the kind of boy ever to lose it; the day was lovely, and the burn ran nowhere near the direction they had been forbidden to take—that of the infected village. But Hughie, wise though he was, did not know or remember that close to the spot for which he was aiming ran a road leading directly from this village to the ten miles distant little town of Linnside,

and even had he thought of it, the possibility of any danger to themselves attending the fact would probably never have struck him. There was another way to Linnside from their home, so Hughie's ignorance or forgetfulness was natural.

The way down to the edge of the burn was steep and difficult, for the shrubs and bushes grew thickly together, and there was no proper path.

"Stay you here, Janet," he said, finding for the child a seat on a nice flat stone at the entrance to the gorge; "I'll be back before you know I am gone, and I'll get the flowers much better without you, little woman; and Mary Ann will be company like."

Janet obeyed without any reluctance. She had implicit faith in Hughie. But after a while Mary Ann confided to her that she was "wearying" of sitting still, and Janet thought it could do no harm to take a turn up and down the sloping field where Hughie had left her. She wandered to a gate a few yards off, and, finding it open, wandered a little farther, till, without knowing it, she was within a stone's throw of the road I mentioned. And here an unexpected sight met Janet's eyes, and made her lose all thought of Hughie and the forget-me-nots, and how frightened he would be at missing her. Drawn up in a corner by some trees stood one of those travelling houses on wheels, in which I suppose every child that ever was born has at one time or other thought that it would be delightful to live. Janet had never seen one before, and she gazed at it in astonishment, till another still more interesting object caught her attention.

It was a child—a little girl just about her own age, a dark-eyed, dark-haired, brown-skinned, but very, very thin little girl, lying on a heap of old shawls and blankets on the grass by the side of the movable house. She seemed to be quite alone—there was no one in the waggon apparently, no sound to be heard; she lay quite still, one thin little hand under her head, the other clasping tightly some two or three poor flowers—a

daisy or two, a dandelion, and some buttercups—which she had managed to reach without moving from her couch. Janet, from under her little green shade, stared at her, and she returned the stare with interest, for all around was so still that the slight rustle made by the little intruder caught her sharp ear at once. But after a moment her eyes wandered down from Janet's fair childish face, on which she seemed to think she had bestowed enough attention, and settled themselves on the lovely object nestling in the little girl's maternal embrace. A smile of pleasure broke over her face.

“What's yon?” she said suddenly.

“What's *what*?” said Janet.

“*Yon*,” repeated the child, pointing with her disengaged hand to the faithful Mary Ann.

“*That*,” exclaimed Janet. “That's my doll. That's Mary Ann Jolly. Did you never see a doll?”

“No,” replied the brown-skinned waif, “never. She's awfu' bonny.”

Janet's maternal vanity was gratified.

“She's guid and she's bonny,” she said, unconsciously imitating, with ludicrous exactness, her own old nurse's pet expression when she was pleased with her. She hugged Mary Ann closer to her as she spoke. “You'd like to have a dolly too, wouldn't you, little girl?”

The child smiled.

“I couldna *gie* her tae ye,” said Janet, relapsing into Scotch, with a feeling that “high English” would probably be lost upon her new friend. “But ye might tak' her for a minute in yer ain arms, if ye like?”

“Ay wad I,” said the child, and Janet stepped closer to her and deposited Mary Ann in her arms.

“Canna ye stan' or walk aboot? Hae ye nae legs?” she inquired.

“Legs,” repeated the child, “what for shud I na hae legs?

I canna rin aboot i' the noo; I've nae been weel, but I'll sune be better. Eh my! but she's awfu' fine," she went on, caressing Mary Ann as she spoke.

But at this moment the bark of a dog interrupted the friendly conversation. Cæsar appeared, and Janet started forward to reclaim her property, her heart for the first time misgiving her as to "what Hughie would say." Just as she was taking Mary Ann out of the little vagrant's arms, Hughie came up. He was hot, breathless, anxious, and, as a natural consequence of the last, especially, angry.

"Naughty Janet, bad girl," he exclaimed, in his excitement growing more "Scotch" than usual. What for didna ye bide whaur I left ye? I couldna think what had become o' ye; bad girl. And wha's that ye're clavering wi'? Shame on ye, Janet."

He darted forward, snatched his little sister roughly by the arm, dropping the precious forget-me-nots in his flurry, and dragged Janet away, making her run so fast that she burst out sobbing with fear and consternation. She could not understand it; it was not like Hughie to be so fierce and rough.

"You are very, very unkind," she began as soon as her brother allowed her to stop to take breath. "Why should I nae speak to the puir wee girl? She looked sae ill lying there her lane, and she was sae extraordinar' pleased wi' Mary Ann."

"You let her touch Mary Ann, did ye?" said Hughie, stopping short. "I couldna have believed, Janet, you'd be such a fule. A big girl, ten years old, to ken na better! It's 'fare-ye-weel' to Mary Ann anyway, and you have yourself to thank for it."

They were standing near the spot where Hughie had left his sister while he clambered down to the burn, and before Janet had the least idea of his intention, Hughie seized the unfortunate doll, and pitched her, with all his strength, far, far away down among the brushwood of the glen.

For an instant Janet stood in perfect silence. She was

too thunderstruck, too utterly appalled and stunned, to take in the reality of what had happened. She had never seen Hughie in a passion in her life; never in all their childish quarrels had he been harsh or "bullying," as I fear too many boys of his age are to their little sisters. She gazed at him in terrified consternation, slowly, very slowly taking in the fact—to her almost as dreadful as if he had committed a murder—that Hughie had thrown away Mary Ann—her own dear, dear Mary Ann; and Hughie, her own brother had done it! Had he lost his senses?

"Hughie," she gasped out at last; that was all.

Hughie looked uneasy, but tried to hide it.

"Come on, Janet," he said, "it's getting late. We must put our best foot foremost, or nurse will be angry."

But Janet took no notice of what he said.

"Hughie," she repeated, "are ye no gaun to get me Mary Ann back again?"

Hughie laughed, half contemptuously. "Get her back again," he said. "She's ower weel hidden for me or anybody to get her back again. And why should I want her back when I've just the noo thrown her awa'? Na, na, Janet, you'll have to put up wi' the loss of Mary Ann; and I only hope you won't have to put up wi' waur. It's your own fault; though maybe I shouldna' have left her," he added to himself.

"Hughie, you've broke my heart," said Janet. "What *did* you do it for?"

"If you'd an ounce of sense you'd know," said Hughie; "and if you don't *I'm* no gaun to tell."

And in dreary silence the two children made their way home—Hughie, provoked, angry, and uneasy, yet self-reproachful and sore-hearted; Janet in an anguish of bereavement and indignation, yet through it all not without little gleams of faith in Hughie still, that mysteriously cruel though his conduct appeared, there must yet somehow have been a good reason for it.

It was not for long, however, that she understood it. She

did not know that immediately they got home honest Hughie went to his father and told him all that had happened, taking blame to himself manfully for having for an instant left Janet alone.

"And you say she does not understand at all why you threw the doll away," said Janet's father. "Did she not notice that the little girl had been ill?"

"Oh yes, but she took no heed of it," Hughie replied. "She thinks it was just awfu' unkind of me to get in such a temper. I would like her to know why it was, but I thought maybe I had better not explain till I had told you."

"You were quite right, Hughie," said his father; "and I think it is better to leave it. Wee Janet is so impressionable and fanciful, it would not do for her to begin thinking she had caught the fever from the child. We must leave it in God's hands, and trust no ill will come of it. And the first day I can go to Linnside you shall come with me, and we'll buy her a new doll."

"Thank you, father," said Hughie gratefully. But he stopped as he was leaving the room, with his hand on the door handle, to say, half-laughing, half-pathetically, "I'm hardly thinking, father, that any new doll will make up to wee Janet for Mary Ann."

Janet heard nothing of this conversation, however, and the silence which was, perhaps mistakenly, preserved about the loss of her favourite added to the mysterious sadness of her fate. The poor little girl moped and pined, but said nothing. To Hughie her manner was gently reproachful, but nothing more. But all her brightness and playfulness had deserted her; she hung about listless and uninterested, and for some days there was not an hour during which one or other of her doting relations—father, mother, sisters, and brothers—did not make up his or her mind that their darling was smitten by the terrible blast of the fever.

A week, ten days, nearly a fortnight passed, and they

began to breathe more freely. Then one day the father, remembering his promise, took Hughie with him to the town to buy a new doll for Janet, instead of her old favourite. I cannot describe to you the one they bought, but I know it was the prettiest that money could get at Linnside, and Hughie came home in great spirits with the treasure in his arms.

“Janet, Janet,” he shouted, as soon as he had jumped off his pony, “where are you, Janet? Come and see what I’ve got for you!”

Janet came slowly out of the study, where she had been lying coiled up on the floor, near the low window, watching for her father’s return.

“I’m here, Hughie,” she said, trying to look interested and bright, though the effort was not very successful.

But Hughie was too excited and eager to notice her manner.

“Look here, Janet,” he exclaimed, unwrapping the paper which covered Miss Dolly. “Now, isn’t *she* a beauty? Far before that daft-like old Mary Ann; eh, Janet?”

Janet took the new doll in her hands. “She’s bonny,” she said, hesitatingly. “It’s very kind of you, Hughie; but I wish, I wish you hadn’t. I don’t care for her. I dinna mean to vex ye, Hughie,” she continued, sadly, “but I canna help it. I want, oh I do want my ain Mary Ann!”

She put the new doll down on the hall table, burst into tears, and ran away to the nursery.

“She’s just demented about that Mary Ann,” said Hughie to his father, who had followed him into the hall.

“I’m sorry for your disappointment, my boy,” said his father, “but you must not take it to heart. I don’t think wee Janet can be well.”

He was right. What they had so dreaded came at last, just as they had begun to hope that the danger was over. The next morning saw little Janet down with the fever. Ah, then, what sad days of anxiety and watching followed! How softly every-



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"I've some one else here to kiss you, Wee Janet," he said.

body crept about—a vain precaution, for poor Janet was unconscious of everything about her. How careworn and tear-stained were all the faces of the household—parents, brothers and sisters, and servants! What sad little bulletins, costing sixpence if not a shilling each in those days, children, were sent off by post every day to the absent ones, with the tidings still of "No better," gradually growing into the still worse, "Very little hope." It must have been a touching sight to see a whole household so cast down about the fate of one tiny, delicate child.

And poor Hughie was the worst of all. They had tried to keep him separate from his sister, but it was no use. He had managed to creep into the room and kiss her unobserved, and then he had it all his own way—all the harm was done. But he could hardly bear to hear her innocent ravings, they were so often about the lost Mary Ann, and Hughie's strange cruelty in throwing her away. "I canna think what came over Hughie to do it," she would say, over and over again. "I want no new dollies. I only want Mary Ann."

Then there came a day on which the doctor said the disease was at its height—a few hours would show on which side the victory was to be; and the anxious faces grew more anxious still, and the silent prayers more frequent. But for many hours of this day Hughie was absent, and the others, in their intense thought about Janet, scarcely missed him. He came home late in the summer evening, with something in his arms, hidden under his jacket. And somehow his face looked more hopeful and happy than for days past.

"How is she?" he asked breathlessly of the first person he met. It was one of the elder sisters.

"Better," she replied, with the tears in her eyes. "O Hughie, how can we thank God enough? She has wakened quite herself, and the doctor says now there is only weakness to fight against. She has been asking for you, Hughie. You may go up and say good-night. Where have you been all the afternoon?"

But Hughie was already half way up the stairs.

He crept into Janet's room, where the mother was on guard. She made a sign to him to come to the bed where little Janet lay, pale, and thin and fragile, but peaceful and conscious.

"Good-night, wee Janet," Hughie whispered; "I'm sae glad wee Janet's better."

"Good-night, Hughie," she answered softly. "Kiss me, Hughie."

"I've some one else here to kiss you, wee Janet," he said.

Janet looked up inquiringly.

"You must not excite her, Hughie," the mother whispered. But Hughie knew what he was about. He drew from under his jacket a queer, familiar figure. It was Mary Ann Jolly! There had been no rain, fortunately for her, during her exposure to the weather, and she was sturdy enough to have stood a few showers, even had there been any. She really looked in no way the worse for her adventure, as Hughie laid her gently down on the pillow beside Janet.

"It's no one to excite her, mother," he said. "It's no stranger; only Mary Ann. She's been away paying a visit to the fairies in the glen, and I think she must have enjoyed it. She's looking as bonny as ever, and she was in no hurry to come home. I had to shout for her all over the glen before I could make her hear. Are you glad she's come, Janet?"

Janet's eyes were glistening. "O Hughie," she whispered, "kiss me again. I can sleep so well now."

The crisis no doubt had been passed before this, but still it is certain that Janet's recovery was faster far than had been expected. And for this she and Hughie, and some of the elder ones, too, I fancy, gave the credit to the return of her favourite. Hughie was well rewarded for his several hours of patient searching in the glen; and I am happy to tell you that he did not catch the fever.

He would have been an elderly, almost an old man by now

had he lived—good, kind Hughie. But that was not God's will for him. He died long ago, in the prime of his youthful manhood; and it is to his little grand-nephews and nieces that wee Janet's daughter has been telling this simple story of a long-ago little girl, and a long-ago doll, poor old Mary Ann Jolly!

BASIL'S VIOLIN

PART I

“THANK you so much for telling me about it. I am pleased, for it is just what I wanted to hear of.”

“And I am so glad for Herr Wildermann’s sake. It rarely happens in this world that one hears of a want and a supply at the same time”; and the speaker, laughing as she said the last words, shook hands once again with her hostess and left her.

Lady Iltyd went to the window,—a low one, leading on to the garden, and looked out. Then she opened it and called out clearly, though not very loudly—

“Basil, Basi—i—il, are you there, my boy?”

“Yes, mother; I’m coming.” And from among the bushes, at a very short distance, there emerged a rather comical little figure. A boy of eight or nine, with a bright rosy face and short dark hair. Over his sailor suit he had a brown holland blouse, which once, doubtless, had been clean, but was certainly so no longer. It stuck out rather bunchily behind, owing to the large collar and handkerchief worn beneath, and as the child was of a sturdy make to begin with, and was extra flushed with his exertions, it was no wonder that his mother stopped in what she was going to say to laugh heartily at her little boy.

“You look like a gnome, Basil,” she said. “What have you been doing to make yourself so hot and dirty?”

“Transplanting, mother. It’s nearly done. I’ve taken a lot of the little wood plants that I have in my garden and put them down here among the big shrubs, where it’s cool and damp. It was too dry and sunny for them in my garden, Andrew says. They’re used to the nice, shady, damp sort of places in the wood, you see, mother.”

"But it isn't the time for transplanting, Basil. It is too late."

"It won't matter, Andrew says, mother. I've put them in such a beautiful wet corner. But I'm awfully hot, and I'm rather dirty."

"Rather," said his mother. "And, Basil, your lessons for to-morrow? It's four o'clock, and you know what your father said about having them done before you come down to dessert."

Basil shook himself impatiently.

"Oh, bother!" he said; "whenever I'm a little happy somebody begins about something horrid. I've such a lot of lessons to-day. And it's a half-holiday. I think it is the greatest shame to call it a half-holiday, and then give more lessons to do than any other day."

At the bottom of her heart Lady Iltyd was a little of Basil's opinion; but she felt it would do no good, and might do a great deal of harm, to say so. Basil went as a day-scholar to a very good private school at Tarnworth, the little country town two miles off. He rode there on his pony in the morning, and rode home again at four o'clock. He liked his school-fellows, and did not *dislike* his teachers, but he could not bear lessons! There was this much excuse for him, that he was not a clever boy in the sense of learning quickly. On the contrary, he learned slowly, and had to read a thing over several times before he understood it. Sometimes he would do so patiently enough; but sometimes—and these "times," I fear, came more frequently than the good ones—he was so *impatient*, so easily discouraged, that it was not a pleasant task to superintend his lessons' learning. Yet he was not without a queer kind of perseverance of his own—he could not bear to go to bed leaving any of his lessons unfinished, and he would go on working at them with a sort of dull, hopeless resolution that was rather piteous, till one reflected that, after all, he might just as well look cheerful about it. But to look cheerful in the face of difficulties was not Basil's "way." With the first difficulty vanished all his brightness and good temper, and all he could do was

to work on like a poor little overdriven slave, with no pleasure or satisfaction in his task. And many an evening bed-time was long past before his lessons were ready, for though Basil well knew how long he took to learn them, and how the later he put them off the harder they grew, there was no getting him to set to work at once on coming home. He would make one excuse after another—"it was not worth while beginning till after tea," or his little sister Blanche had begged him to play with her just for five minutes, and they "hadn't noticed how late it was," or—or—it would be impossible to tell all the reasons why Basil never could manage to begin his lessons so as to get them done at a reasonable hour. So that at last his father had made the rule of which his mother reminded him—that he was not to come down to dessert unless his lessons were done.

Now, not coming down to dessert meant more to Basil than it sounds, and nothing was a greater punishment to him. It was not that he was too fond of nice things, for he was not at all a greedy boy, though he liked an orange, or a juicy pear, or a macaroon biscuit as much as anybody, and he liked, too, to be neatly dressed, and sit beside his father in the pretty dining-room, by the nicely arranged table with the flowers and the fruit and the sparkling wine and shining glass. For though Basil was not in some ways a clever child, he had great taste for pretty and beautiful things. But it was none of the things I have mentioned that made him so *very* fond of "coming down to dessert." It was another thing. It was his mother's playing on the piano.

Every evening when Lady Ilyd left the dining-room, followed by Basil and Blanche, she used to go straight to the grand piano which stood in one corner of the library, where they generally sat, and there she would play to the children for a quarter of an hour or so, just whatever they asked for. She needed no "music paper," as Blanche called it; the music seemed to come out of her fingers of itself. And this was Basil's happiest moment of the day. Blanche liked it too, but not as much as Basil. She

would sometimes get tired of sitting still, and begin to fidget about, so that now and then her mother would tell her to run off to bed without waiting for nurse to come for her. But not so Basil. There he would sit—or lie, perhaps, generally on the white fluffy rug before the fire—with the soft dim light stealing in through the coloured glass of the high windows, or in winter evenings with no light but that of the fire fitfully dancing on the rows and rows and *rows* of books that lined the walls from floor to ceiling, only varied here and there by the portrait of some powdered-haired great-grandfather or grandmother smiling, or sometimes, perhaps, frowning down on their funny little descendant in his sailor-suit, with his short-cropped, dark head. A quaint little figure against the gleaming white fur, dreaming—what?—he could not have told you, for he had not much cleverness in telling what he thought. But his music-dreams were very charming nevertheless, and in after life, whenever anything beautiful or exquisite came in his way, Basil's thoughts always flew back to the old library and his mother's playing.

For long he had imagined that nothing of music kind could be more delightful. But a short time before this little story begins a new knowledge had come to him. At a concert at Tarnworth—for once or twice a year there were good concerts at the little town—he had heard a celebrated violinist play, and it seemed to Basil as if a new world had opened to him.

“Mother,” he said, when the concert was over, looking up at his mother with red cheeks and sparkling eyes, “it’s better than the piano—that little fiddle, I mean. It’s like—like——”

“Like what, my boy?”

“I can’t say it,” said Basil, “but it’s like as if the music didn’t belong to *here* at all. Like as if it came out of the air somehow, without notes or anything. I think if I was an awfully clever man I could say things out of a fiddle, far better than write them in books.”

His mother smiled at him.

"But you mustn't call it a fiddle, Basil. A violin is the right name."

"Violin," repeated Basil thoughtfully. And a few minutes later, when they were in the carriage on their way home, "Mother," he said, "do you think I might learn to play the violin?"

"I should like it very much," said his mother. "But I fear there is no teacher at Tarnworth. I will inquire, however. Only, Basil, there is one thing. The violin is difficult, and you don't like difficulties."

Basil opened his eyes.

"Difficult," he said, and as he spoke he put up his left arm as he had seen the violinist do, sawing the air backwards and forwards with an imaginary bow in his right—"difficult! I *can't* fancy it would be difficult. But anyway, I'd awfully like to learn it."

This had been two or three months ago. Lady Iltyd had not forgotten Basil's wish; and, indeed, if she had been inclined to do so, I don't think Basil would have let her. For at least two or three times a week he asked her if she had found a violin teacher yet, and whether it wouldn't be a good plan to write to London for a violin. For, at the bottom of his heart, Basil had an idea which he did not quite like to express, in the face of what his mother had said as to the difficulty of violin playing, namely, that teaching at all would be unnecessary!

"If I only had a violin in my arms," he used to say to himself as he fiddled away with his invisible bow, "I am *sure* I could make it sing out whatever I wanted."

And I am afraid that this idea of violin playing which had taken such a hold of him, did not help him to do his lessons any the quicker. He would fall into a brown study in the middle of them, imagining himself with the longed-for treasure in his possession, and almost *hearing* the lovely sounds, to wake up with a start to his half-finished Latin exercise or French

verb on the open copy-book before him, so that it was really no wonder that the complaint, evening after evening repeated, "Basil hasn't finished his lessons," at last wore out his father's patience.

We have been a long time in returning to the garden and listening to the conversation between Basil and his mother.

"Yes, I think it's a shame," repeated Basil, *apropos* of Wednesday afternoon lessons.

"But it can't be altered," said his mother, "and instead of wasting time in grumbling, I think it would be much better to set to work. And Basil, listen. If you really exert yourself to the utmost, you may still get your lessons done in time this evening. And if they *are* done in time, and you can come down to dessert, I shall have something to tell you in the library after dinner."

"Something to tell me," repeated Basil, looking rather puzzled. "How do you mean, mother? Something nice, do you mean?"

He did not take up ideas very quickly, and now and then looked puzzled about things that would have been easily understood by most children.

"Nice, of course it is nice, you stupid old fellow," said his mother, laughing. "Are you in a brown study, Basil? That bodes ill for your lessons. Come, rouse yourself and give *all* your attention to them, and let me see a bright face at dessert. *Of course* it is something 'nice' I have to tell you, or I wouldn't make a bribe of it, would I? It's very wrong to bribe you, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Basil. "I don't think it can be if you do it. Kiss me, mother. I'll try to do my lessons quickly," and lifting up his rosy face for his mother's kiss, he ran off. "But oh, how I do hate them!" he said to himself as he ran.

After all, "they" were not so very difficult today, or perhaps Basil really did try hard for once. However that may have

been, the result was a happy one. At dessert two bright little people made their appearance in the dining-room, and before his father had time to ask him the question he had hitherto so dreaded, the boy burst out with the good news——

“All done, father, every one, more than half an hour ago.”

“Yes,” said Blanche complacently, “he’s been *werry* good. He’s put his fingers in his ears, and kept humming to himself *such* a lot, and he hasn’t played the vi’lin one time.”

“Played the violin!” repeated her father. “What does she mean? You didn’t tell me Basil had already be——” he went on, turning to the children’s mother; but she hastily interrupted him.

“Blanche means playing an imaginary violin,” she said, smiling. “Ever since Basil heard Signor L—— at Tarnworth, his head has been running on violins so that he stops in the middle of his lessons to refresh himself with a little inaudible music.”

As she spoke she got up and moved toward the door.

“Bring your biscuits and fruit into the library, children,” she said. “You can eat them there. I’m not going to play to you this evening. We’re going to talk instead.”

Up jumped Basil.

“I don’t want any fruit,” he said, “I really don’t. Blanche, you stay with father and eat all you want. I want to be a little while alone with mother in the library. Mayn’t I, mother?” he added coaxingly. “Blanche doesn’t mind.”

“You are really very complimentary to *me*,” said his father, laughing. “Why should Blanche mind?”

“I doesn’t,” said Blanche, very contentedly watching her father peeling a pear for her. So Basil and his mother went off together for their talk.

“About the ‘something nice,’ mother?” began Basil.

“Well, my boy, I’m quite ready to tell you. Mrs. Marchcote was here to-day. You know who I mean—the lady who

lives in that pretty house at the end of Tarnworth High Street. You pass it every morning going to school."

"I know," said Basil, nodding his head. "But I don't care about Mrs. Marchcote, mother. Is she going to have a children's party—is that it? I don't think I care about parties, mother." And his face looked rather disappointed.

"Basil, Basil, how impatient you are! I never said anything about a children's party. Mrs. Marchcote told me something quite different from that. Listen, Basil. A young German—Ulric Wildermann is his name—has come to Tarnworth in hopes of making his living by teaching the violin. He can give pianoforte lessons also, but he plays the violin better. He plays it, she says, *very* beautifully. He has got no pupils yet, Basil. But—who do you think is going to be his first one?"

Basil gazed at his mother. For a moment he felt a little puzzled.

"Mother," he said at last, "do you mean—oh, mother, *are* you going to let me have lessons? Shall I have a dear little violin of my own? Oh, mother, mother!"

And he jumped up from the rug where he had been lying at his mother's feet, and looked as if he were ready to turn head over heels for joy!

"Yes, my boy," said his mother; "you are going to have your first lesson the day after to-morrow, and Mr. Wildermann is to choose you a violin. But listen, Basil, and think well of what I say. It is *not* easy to learn to play the violin. Even if a child has a great deal of taste—talent even—for music, it requires great patience and perseverance to learn to play the violin at all well. No instrument requires more patience before you can arrive at anything really good. I would not say all this to another child—I would let Blanche, for instance, find out the difficulties for herself, and meet them as they come, cheerfully and brightly as she always does. But you are so exaggerated about difficulties, Basil, that I want to save yourself

and me vexation and trouble before you begin the violin. You are too confident at first, and you cannot believe that there will be difficulties, and then you go to the other extreme and lose heart. Now, I warn you that the violin is *very* difficult. And it is not a thing you *must* learn—not like your lessons at school. It will be a great, an immense pleasure to you once you master it, but unless you resolve to be patient and persevering and *hopeful* in learning it, you had better not begin it."

Lady Iltyd spoke very earnestly. She was anxious to make an impression on Basil, for she saw more clearly than any one the faults of his character, and longed to help him to overcome them. For a moment or two Basil remained silent, for he was, as she had hoped he would be, struck by what she had said, and was thinking over it. Then he jumped up, and throwing his arms round his mother's neck, kissed her very lovingly.

"Mother dear," he said, "I do want to learn it, and I will try. Even if it is very difficult, I'll try. You'll see if I won't, for I do love music, and I love *you*, mother. And I would like to please you."

Lady Iltyd kissed him in return.

"My own dear boy," she said, "you will please me very much if you overcome that bad habit of losing heart over difficulties."

"He *may* learn more things than music in learning the violin," she thought to herself.

But as Basil went upstairs to bed, fiddling at his invisible violin all the way, and whistling the tune he liked to fancy he was playing, *he* said to himself: "I do mean to try, but I *can't* believe it is so difficult as mother says."

PART II

THAT same afternoon an elderly woman was sitting alone by the window of a shabby little parlour over a grocer's shop in the High Street of Tarnworth. She had a gentle, careworn face—a face that looked as if its owner had known much sorrow, but had not lost heart and patience. She was knitting—knitting a stocking, but so deftly and swiftly that it was evident she did not need to pay any attention to what her fingers were doing. Her eyes—soft, old, blue eyes, with the rather sad look those clear blue eyes often get in old age—gazed now and then out of the window—for from where she sat a corner of the ivy-covered church tower was to be seen making a pleasant object against the sky—and now and then turned anxiously toward the door.

"He is late, my poor Ulric," she said to herself. "And yet I almost dread to see him come in, with the same look on his face—always the same sad disappointment! Ah, what a mistake it has been, I fear, this coming to England—but yet we did it for the best, and it seemed so likely to succeed here where there are two or three such good schools and no music teacher. We did it for the best, however, and there is no use regretting it. The good God sees fit to try us—but still we must trust Him. Ah, if it were only I; but my poor boy!"

And the old eyes filled with slow-coming tears.

They were hastily brushed away, however, for at that moment the door opened and a young man, breathless with excitement, hurried into the room.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, but before he could say more she interrupted him.

"What is it, my boy? What is it, Ulric?" she exclaimed. "No bad news, surely?"

"Bad news, mother dear? I scarcely see what more bad news *could* come to us. As long as we have each other, what is

there for us to lose? But I did not mean to speak gloomily this morning, for I have brought you *good* news. Fancy, mother, only fancy—I have got a pupil at last."

"My Ulric—that *is* good news!" said poor Mrs. Wildermann.

"And who knows what it may lead to," said the young man. "I have always heard that the *first* pupil is the difficulty—once started, one gets on rapidly. Especially if the pupil is one likely to do one credit, and I fancy this will be the case with this boy. Mrs. Marchcote—it is through her kindness I have been recommended—says he has unusual taste for music. He has been longing to learn the violin."

"Who is he?" asked the mother.

"The son of Sir John Iltyd—one of the principal families here. I could not have a better introduction. I am to go the day after to-morrow—three lessons a week, and well paid."

He went on to explain all about the terms to his mother, who listened with a thankful heart, as she saw Ulric's bright eyes and eager, hopeful expression.

"He has not looked like that for many a long day," she thought to herself, "and the help has not come too soon. Ulric would have been even more unhappy had he known how very little we have left."

And she felt glad that she had struggled on without telling her son quite the worst of things. What would she not have borne for him—how had she not struggled for him all these years? He was the only one left her, the youngest and last of her children, for the other three had died while still almost infants, and Ulric had come to them when she and her husband were no longer young, and had lost hopes of ever having a child to cheer their old age. So never was a son more cherished. And he deserved it. He had been the best of sons, and had tried in his boyish way to replace his father, though he was only twelve years old when that father died. Since then life had been hard on them both, doubly hard, for each suffered for the other even more than personally,

and yet in another sense not so hard as if either had been alone. They had had misfortune after misfortune—the little patrimony which had enabled Mrs. Wildermann to yield to Ulric's darling wish of being a musician by profession, had been lost by a bad investment just as his musical education was completed, and it seemed too late in the day for him to try anything else. And so for a year or two they had struggled on, faring not so badly in the summer when living is cheaper, and Ulric often got engagements for the season in the band at some watering-place, but suffering sadly in the long, cold German winters—suffering as those do who will not complain, who keep up a respectable appearance to the last. And then came the idea of emigrating to England, suggested to them by a friend who had happened to hear of what seemed like an opening at Tarnworth, where they had now been for nearly two months without finding any pupils for Ulric, or employment of any kind in his profession for the young musician.

So it is easy to understand the delight with which he accepted Lady Iltyd's proposal, made to him by Mrs. Marchcote.

It would be difficult to say which of the two, master or pupil, looked forward the more eagerly to the first music-lesson. Basil dreamed of it night and day. Ulric Wildermann on his side built castles in the air about the number of pupils he was to have, and the fame he was to gain through his success with Lady Iltyd's boy. Poor fellow, it was not from vanity that his mind dwelt on and so little doubted this same wonderful success!

And in due course came the day after to-morrow, neither hastened nor retarded by the eagerness with which it was looked forward to.

“What a beautiful home! The child cannot but be refined and tender in nature who has been brought up in such a home,” thought Ulric Wildermann, ready at all times to think the best and more than usually inclined to-day to see things through rose-coloured spectacles.

He was walking up the long avenue of elms, leading to the

Hall. The weather was lovely, already hot, however, and he would have liked to take off his hat and let the breeze—what there was of it, that is to say—play on his forehead. But he had not a free hand, for he was loaded with no less than three violins, his own and two others, what are called half and three-quarters sized, as, till he saw his little pupil, he could not tell which would suit him. He did look rather a comical object, I dare say, to the tall footman at the door, but not so to the eager child who had spent the last hour at least in peeping out to see if his master was not yet coming.

“Mother,” he exclaimed, rushing back into the room, “he’s come. And he’s brought loads of violins.”

“*Loads*,” repeated Lady Iltyd, smiling down at her boy, whose rosy cheeks and bright eyes were still rosier and brighter than usual; “well, among them it is to be hoped there will be one to suit you.”

Then she turned to Ulric, who was standing in the doorway, half dazzled by the brightness of the pretty room into which he was ushered after the darker hall, and still more confused by his intense anxiety to please the graceful lady who was greeting him so kindly, and to win the liking of the child he was to teach. But Basil’s mother’s pleasant manner soon set him at his ease, and in a minute or two he was opening the violin cases and discussing which would be the right size for the boy. Basil gazed and listened in silence. At first glance Ulric had felt a little disappointed. His new pupil was not certainly a poetical looking child! His short sturdy figure and round rosy face spoke of the perfection of hearty boyish life, but nothing more. But his breathless eagerness, the intense interest in his eyes—most of all the look in his face as he listened to a little caprice which Ulric played on his own violin as a sort of introduction to the lesson, soon made the musician change his opinion.

“He has it—he has the musician’s soul. One can see it!” he half said, half whispered to Lady Iltyd, though he had the good

sense to understand what might have seemed a little cold in her answer.

"I think Basil truly loves music," she said, "but you will join with me, I am sure Mr. Wildermann, in telling him that to be a musician at all, to play *well* above all, takes much patience and perseverance. Nothing in this world can be done without trouble, can it?"

"Ah, no," said Ulric Wildermann, "that is true."

But Basil, whose fingers were fidgeting to touch at last the violin and dainty bow, said nothing.

"I will leave you," said his mother. "I think you will find it better to be alone with Basil, Mr. Wildermann."

And she left the room.

She listened with some anxiety to the sounds which now and then made their way to the room where she sat writing. Sweet, clear sounds occasionally from the master's violin, but mingled, it must be confessed, with others the reverse of musical. Squeakings and gruntings, and a dreadful sort of scraping whine, not to be described in words.

"My poor Basil," thought his mother, though it was a little difficult not to smile at a *most* unearthly shriek that just then reached her ears. "I hope he is not losing his temper already."

But she waited quietly till the sounds ceased. Then came the soft sweet notes of a melody which she knew well, played by Mr. Wildermann alone; and a few minutes after she saw among the trees the tall thin figure of the young German, laden with but two violins this time as he made his way down the avenue.

She waited a minute or two to see if Basil would come to her. Then, as he did not, she returned to the morning room where he had had his lesson. He was still there, standing by the window, but she was pleased to hear as she went in that he was humming to himself the air that Ulric had played last.

"Well, Basil," she said, "and how did you get on?"

The boy turned round—there was a mixture of expressions

on his face. A rather dewy look about his eyes made his mother wonder for a moment if he had been crying. But when he spoke it was so cheerfully that she thought she must have been mistaken.

"He plays *so* beautifully, mother," he said.

"Yes," she replied. "I knew he did. I heard him one day at Mrs. Marchcote's, and I listened this morning."

"You listened, mother?" he said. "Did you hear how awfully it squeaked with me?"

"Of course," said Lady Iltyd, in a matter-of-fact way; "it is always so at first."

Basil seemed relieved.

"Yes," he said, "*he* said so too. But I don't mind. He says I shall very soon be able to make it sound prettily—to get nice *sounds*, you know, even before I can play tunes, if—" and Basil hesitated.

"If what?"

"If I practise a lot. But I think I shall. It's rather fun after all, and I do so like to have that ducky little violin in my arms. It does feel so jolly," and he turned with sparkling eyes again to the dainty little case containing his new treasure.

His mother was pleased. The first brunt of disappointment which she was sure Basil had felt, whether he owned to it or not, had passed off better than she had expected.

And for some days his energy continued. At all hours, when the boy was at home, unearthly squeaks and shrieks were to be heard in various parts of the house, for it was not at all Basil's way to confine his practisings to his own quarters. Anywhere that came handy—on the staircase, in the pantry, when he took it into his head to pay a visit to the footmen, the boy and his violin were to be seen at all sorts of odd hours, and alas, still more surely to be *heard!* For a while his mother thought it best not to interfere; she did not wish to check his ardour, and the second and third lessons went off, as far as she

could judge, very well. But gradually the violin grew less talkative—a day, then a couple of days, then even longer, passed without its voice being heard, and one day, towards the close of the fifth or sixth lesson, Lady Iltyd, going into the room, saw a look she knew too well on her little son's face. He flung down the violin and turned to Ulric Wildermann——

“I *can't* play any more—nasty thing—I believe it's got a bad fairy inside it,” he said, half in fun, half in petulance.

“Why, Basil——” began his mother, but her glance happening at the moment to fall on the young German, she stopped short, startled at the look of intense distress that overspread his features. “He thinks I shall blame *him*, poor fellow,” she thought, and, with her quick kindness, she tried, indirectly, to reassure him.

“Don't look so grave about this silly little boy, Mr. Wildermann,” she said brightly. “Suppose you drive away the bad fairy by playing to us, and let lazy Basil rest a little.”

Basil's face, which had clouded over at the beginning of this speech, brightened up again. He flung himself down on the rug with the air of one intending to enjoy himself. And for the next ten minutes or so not a sound was heard but the exquisite tones of the master's violin, thrilling with intensity, then warbling like a bird in the joyous springtime, bringing the tears to the boy's eyes with its tender pathos, and then flushing his cheeks with excitement, till at last they died away in the distance as it were, as if returning to the enchanted land from whence they came.

Basil gave a deep sigh.

“Ah,” he said, in a low voice, “to play like *that*——”

Ulric Wildermann's face lighted up.

“He *has* it—he loves it so much, madame,” he said half apologetically to Lady Iltyd.

“Yes,” she said, but her tone was rather grave. “But it is not enough to love it. He must learn not to be so easily

'discouraged. You know, my boy, what I said to you at the beginning,' she went on, turning to Basil, 'it is not a *necessity* to learn the violin. I would rather you gave it up than make it a worry and vexation to yourself and others.'

Basil stopped her with a kiss.

"It's only when the bad fairy comes," he said. "Don't be vexed with me, mother. I'm in a beautiful good temper now."

A day or two after this, Basil's mother left home for a fortnight. She said a few words to him before she went, about his violin lessons, but not much, for she had heard him practising again with more attention, and she had begun to hope his impatience and discouragement had been merely a passing fit. So she only repeated to him what she had said already. Basil listened in silence, with an expression on his face she did not quite understand. But she thought it better to say no more, especially when the boy flung his arms around her neck, and repeated more than once—

"I do want to please you, little mother; I do, I do," he cried; and her last sight of him, as the carriage drove away, was standing with his violin in his arms at the hall-door, pretending to fiddle away at a great rate.

"He is only a baby after all," said Lady Iltyd to herself. "I must not be too anxious about his faults. This fortnight will test his perseverance about the violin. If he is not going to be steady about it, he must give it up."

Alas! the fortnight tested Basil and found him wanting. There were some excuses perhaps. It was very hot, and the half-yearly examinations were coming on. In his parents' absence it had been arranged that he was to stay later at school so as to get his lessons done before coming home—a very necessary precaution; for without his mother at hand to keep him up to his work it is to be doubted if the lessons would often have been finished before midnight! Basil would not have gone to bed and left them undone—that was not his way; but he would

have wasted three hours over what with energy and cheerfulness might have been well done in one. At school, under the eye of a master, this was less likely to occur—the boy was to some extent *forced* to give his attention and keep up his spirit, though the master, whose business it was to superintend the lessons preparing, found his labours increased in no trifling way during the fortnight of Basil's staying later.

And when he got home after all this hard work, the boy felt inclined for a romp with Blanche, or a stroll in the garden, far more than for practising the violin! Half-holidays, too, in hot weather, presented many temptations. The hay was down in the park on the side nearest the house, the strawberries were at their prime; there seemed always something else to do than struggling with the capricious little instrument whose "contrariness," as he called it, really made Basil sometimes fancy it was bewitched.

"You've got it inside you; why won't you let it come out for me as well as for him?" he would say, addressing his violin, half in fun, half in petulance, after some vain but not very sustained effort to draw out of it tones in any way approaching those which in Ulric Wildermann's hands seemed to come of themselves. "No, I've no patience with you. It's too bad," and down he would fling violin and bow, declaring to himself he would never touch them again. But when the day for the music lesson came round, and Ulric Wildermann drew out some few lovely notes before Basil was ready to begin, all the boy's impatience disappeared, and he listened as if entranced till his master recalled his attention. And thus, seeing the child's undoubted love for music, Ulric could not yet feel altogether disengaged, though again there were times when he doubted if his efforts would ever succeed in making a musician of the boy.

"But as long as he likes it so much," he would say to himself, "and provided he does not *wish* to give it up, it would be

wrong of me to suggest it. In any case it is for his mother to judge."

Before the fortnight was over, however, Ulric's patience was sorely tried. There came a day on which, with a sudden outburst of temper, Basil refused to try any more, and only by dint of promising to play to him for a quarter of an hour after the lesson was over, could his master get him to make any effort. Nor was it worth much when made.

And poor Ulric walked home that day to the little lodging over the grocer's shop with a heavy heart.

PART III.

IN the first pleasant excitement of her return home and finding the children well, and to all appearance happy, Lady Iltyd did not think of what had, nevertheless, been often in her mind during her absence—namely, Basil's violin!

But the day after, when he came back from school and was beginning to tell her all he had been busied about while she was away, the question soon came to her lips, "And what about your violin, my boy?"

Basil hesitated—then his rosy face grew rosier than before, and he stood first upon one leg and then upon the other, a habit of his when not quite easy in his mind.

"Well?" said Lady Iltyd.

Then out it came.

"Mother," he began, "I didn't like to tell you yesterday just when you first came back, but I was going to tell you. I know you'll be vexed, but I must tell you the truth. I haven't got on a bit—I tried to practise at first, but I *can't* get to play, and I hate it—I mean I hate not being able to play—and please, mother, I want to leave it off."

A rather sad look came over Lady Iltyd's face, but she only said quietly—

"Very well, Basil. You have quite made up your mind, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied. "You know you always said, mother, I needn't go on with it if I didn't—if it was too difficult," for he could not truthfully say "if I didn't care for it."

"Yes. I told you it was no *necessity*. Very well, then, I will tell Mr. Wildermann to-morrow."

"But, mother," Basil hesitated, "I didn't want you to be vexed about it."

"I am not *vexed*," his mother replied. "My disappointment is another matter. But I will keep to what I said. It is better for you to give it up than to make a trouble of it to yourself and others. Now run away, for I am busy."

Basil went out of the room slowly, and not feeling altogether happy in his mind. "It isn't fair of mother," he said to himself; "she told me I needn't go on with it if I didn't like, and she never said she'd be vexed if I gave it up, and she *is* vexed." But he would not remember how much and often his mother had warned him before he began, how she had told him of the patience and perseverance required, and how he had refused to believe her! And, boy-like, he soon forgot all about it in a game with Blanche and the dogs in the garden, or remembered it only with a feeling of relief that he need not cut short his play to go in to practise his unlucky violin. But a remark of his little sister's rather destroyed his equanimity.

"I'm going in now, Basil," she said with the little "proper" air she sometimes put on; "I've not finished my scales yet, and I won't have time after tea. And you should go in for your violin, Basil. Come along."

"No," said Basil, rolling himself again lazily on the smooth lawn; "I'm not going to bother with it any more. I've given it up."

Blanche's eyes opened wide.

"Oh, Basil!" she exclaimed. "How sorry mother will be!"

"Rubbish," said Basil, roughly. "Mother always said I might leave it off if I liked. I don't want you to preach to me, Blanche." Upon which Blanche walked away, her little person erect with offended dignity.

Basil did not feel happy, but he called the dogs to him and went off whistling.

The next day was a half-holiday. Basil came home at mid-day, and the violin lesson was in the afternoon.

"Am I to have a lesson to-day, mother?" said the boy at luncheon.

"Mr. Wildermann is coming" replied his mother, "it would be very rude to let him come for nothing. I will see him first, and then you can go to him for the hour. If he likes to play to you instead of your having a lesson, I do not care. It does not signify *now*."

The idea would have been very much to Basil's taste, but the tone in which his mother said that "now," made him again feel vexed. He tried to fancy he had cause for being so, for he would not own to the real truth—that he was vexed with himself, and that "himself" deserved it.

"It isn't fair," he repeated half sullenly.

Two hours later he was summoned to the library. Ulric Wildermann had come fully a quarter of an hour before—he had heard his ring, and he knew his mother was in the drawing-room waiting for him. When he entered the library he thought at first there was no one there—the violin cases lay open on the table, the music-stand was placed ready as usual; but that was all. No pleasant voice met him with a friendly greeting in broken English and words of kindly encouragement.

"Can Mr. Wildermann have gone already?" thought the boy. "He might have waited to say good-bye. What did Sims call me for if he had gone?"

And he was turning to leave the room with a mixture of feelings—irritation and some disappointment, mingled nevertheless

less, with a certain sense of relief, for he had dreaded this last lesson—when a slight, a very slight sound seeming to come from somewhere near the windows, caught his ear. He had come into the room more softly than his wont, and his footfall had made no sound on the thick carpet. The person who was hidden by the curtains had not heard him, had no idea any one was in the room, for through a sort of half-choked sob the child heard two or three confused words which, though uttered in German, were easy enough to understand—

“My mother, ah, my poor mother! How can I tell her? Oh, my mother!”

And startled and shocked, Basil stopped short in the question that was on his lips. “Who’s there? Is it you, Blanche?” he had been on the point of saying, when the words caught his ears.

“It must be Mr. Wildermann—can he be *crying?*” said Basil to himself, his cheeks growing red as the idea struck him. “What should I do?”

He had no time to consider the question, for as he stood in perplexity his little dog Yelpie, who had followed him into the room, suddenly becoming aware of the state of things, dashed forward with a short sharp bark.

“Yelpie—Yelpie,” cried Basil; “be quiet, Yelpie. It’s only Mr. Wildermann. Don’t you know him, Yelpie? What a stupid you are!”

He went on talking fast to give the young German time to recover himself, for, on hearing Basil’s voice, Ulric had come forward from the shelter of the curtain. He was not red, but pale, —very pale, with a look of such intense misery in his eyes, that Basil’s momentary feeling of contempt entirely faded into one of real anxiety and sympathy.

“Are you ill, Mr. Wildermann? You look so strange. Is your mother ill? Is anything dreadful the matter?” he asked hurriedly, pressing forward, nearer to the young man.

Ulric tried to smile, but it was a poor attempt, and he felt

that it was so. Suddenly a sort of weak, faint feeling came over him—he had walked over to the Park in the full heat of the day, and the meals that were eaten over the grocer's shop were very frugal!—he had not been prepared for the news that had met him. “Could I—might I have a glass of water, Master Basil?” he said, drawing to him a chair and dropping into it.

“I'll ring for—no, stay, I'll fetch it myself,” said Basil, with quick understanding. “I shouldn't like the servants to know he had been *crying*—poor man,” he thought to himself as he left the room. And in two minutes he was back with a glass of wine and water.

“I made Sims put some sherry in it,” he said half apologetically. “You've knocked yourself up somehow, Mr. Wildermann, haven't you?”

And Ulric drank obediently, and managed this time to smile more successfully. “How kind and thoughtful the boy was—how could he be the cause of such sorrow, if indeed he understood it!” thought the young man to himself.

“I—yes—perhaps it was the hot sun,” he said confusedly, as he put down the glass. “Thank you, very much. I am all right now. Had we not better begin? Not that I am hurried,” he went on. “I can stay a full hour from now. I have no engagements—nothing to hurry me home,” he added sadly, for in his heart he was thinking how he dreaded the return home, and what he would have to tell his poor old mother.

“But what's the matter?” persisted Basil, who, now that the ice was broken, felt inclined to get to the bottom of things. “What are you so troubled about—what were you——?” He hesitated and stopped short, and again his rosy cheeks grew redder than usual.

Ulric Wildermann looked up. He was still very pale, but he did not seem self-conscious or ashamed.

“You saw my distress?” he said quietly. “Ah, well, I could not help it—the thought of my poor mother——” He turned

away and bit his lips. "I thought you knew the cause of it," he went on; "your lady mother, did you not know—did she not tell you that she meant to-day to give me notice that the lessons are to cease—that this is to be the last?"

Basil opened his mouth as if he meant to say something, and stood there, forgetting to shut it again, and staring up in Ulric's face, though no words came. Ulric, after waiting a moment or two, turned away and began arranging the violins. Then at last the boy ejaculated—

"Mr. Wildermann, you—you don't mean to say—" and stopped short again.

"To say what?" asked the young German, but without much tone of interest in his voice. He had quite mastered himself by now—a sort of dull, hopeless resignation was coming over him—it did not seem to matter what Basil said about it; it was all settled, and the momentary gleam of good-fortune which had so raised his hopes had faded into the dark again. "We must go back to Germany," he was saying to himself. "Somehow or other I must scrape together money enough to take my mother back to her own country. There at least she need not starve. I can earn our daily bread, even if I have to give up music for ever."

But again Basil's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Mr. Wildermann," said the boy, speaking now with eagerness, and throwing aside his hesitation, "is it possible that it is about my lessons that you're unhappy. Does it *matter* to you if I give them up? I never thought of it."

"Master Basil," said the young man sadly, "it does not signify now. It is all settled. But I do not blame you. It is not your fault—at least, it is not exactly your fault. You are so young, and the violin is very difficult. I am sorry to lose you as a pupil, for I think you could have learnt well, if you had had more hopefulness and perseverance."

And again he turned away as if there were no more to be said.

But Basil was not to be so easily satisfied.

“Mr. Wildermann,” he exclaimed, going nearer to his master and pulling him gently by the sleeve, “that can’t be all. I dare say you’re vexed at my giving it up when you’ve tried so hard to teach me, but that wouldn’t make you so *dreadfully* sorry. Mr. Wildermann, do tell me all about it? Is it because—because of the money?” he whispered at last. “Are you so—does it matter so much?”

Ulric turned his pale face to the boy. Its expression was still sad—very sad, but quiet and resigned.

“Yes, my child,” he said composedly. “Why should I hide it? There is no shame in it—yes, it is because of the money. We are *very* poor. And also I had hoped much from giving you lessons. I thought if I succeeded as I expected it would have brought me other pupils.”

Basil gazed up in the young man’s face for a moment or two without speaking. He did not take in ideas very quickly, and perhaps he had never before in his life thought so seriously as at this moment.

“I see,” he said at last. “I did not understand before. If I had known—but even now it is not too late. Mr. Wildermann. I need not give up my lessons. I will ask mother to let me go on with them, and you will see she will agree in a moment.”

A gleam of pleasure lighted up Ulric’s pale face, but it faded almost as quickly as it had come.

“Thank you for your kind thought, my little friend,” he said; “but what you propose would not be right. It would not be right for your mother to pay me money for teaching you when she had decided that she did not want me to teach you any more. It would be a mere charity to me—it would be more honest for me to ask for charity at once,” he went on, the colour mounting to his face. “No, Basil, it could not be; but thank you as much. Now let us go on with our lesson.”

Basil understood, but was not satisfied. The lesson passed

quietly. Never had the boy so thoroughly given his attention, or tried so hard to overcome the difficulties which had so disheartened him.

"It is too bad," he said to himself; "but it is all my own fault. I believe I could have got on if I had really tried. And now it is too late. He wouldn't give me lessons now, for he would think it was only for him."

Suddenly an idea struck him.

"Mr. Wildermann," he said, "won't you do *this*? Suppose I ask for just six lessons more, and I *will* try. You'll see if I don't. Well, after these six, if I'm not getting on any better, it'll be given up. But if I am, and if I really *want* to go on, you won't think it's not right, will you?"

Ulric hesitated.

"No," he said; "I have no scruples in going on teaching you, for I feel certain you could learn well if you were more hopeful. But you must explain it all to your mother, and—and—" He stopped short, and then went on resolutely. "I will not be ashamed. It is for my mother—anything for her. It was only the feeling, my boy—but perhaps you are too young to understand—the feeling that it was almost like asking charity."

"I do understand," exclaimed Basil, "and I don't think I need tell mother *yet*, Mr. Wildermann. I don't want to promise again, and perhaps not keep my promise. I'll just ask for the six lessons, and tell mother I can't tell her why just yet. And then think how surprised she'll be if I really do get on"; and the boy's eyes sparkled with delight. But to Ulric's there came tears of thankfulness.

If Lady Iltyd suspected in part what had worked the change in Basil's ideas and prompted his request, she was too wise to say so. His petition for six lessons more was granted willingly, but not lightly.

"Do you really mean to profit by them, Basil?" she asked.

"If so, I am only too willing that you should go on and give yourself a fair trial."

"That is it, mother," said the boy eagerly. "I want to see, to try if I can't do better. At least that is *partly* it," he went on, for he had already told her that he could not explain the whole just yet.

So poor Ulric Wildermann went home with a lighter heart than he had expected. He hoped much from these six lessons, for it was evident that Basil meant to put his heart into them.

"I need not tell my mother of my fears," thought Ulric to himself, "for they may, after all, prove to be only fears, and what would be the use of making her miserable in such a case?" And he was so bright and cheerful that evening in the little sitting-room over the grocer's shop, that even his mother's eyes failed to discover that he had had more than usual anxiety that day.

One week, two weeks, three weeks passed. It was the day of the last of the six lessons.

"Mother," said Basil that morning when he was starting for school, "I have my violin lesson this afternoon when I come home, you know. Mr. Wildermann told me to ask you if you would come in to-day while I am playing. Not at the beginning, please, but about half-way through. He wants you to see if I am getting on better," and then, with a very happy kiss, he was off.

Lady Iltyd had left Basil quite to himself about his violin these last weeks. She had not *heard* much of his practising, but she had noticed that he got his school lessons done quickly and without needing to be reminded, and then regularly disappeared in his own quarters, and she had her private hopes and expectations.

Nor were they disappointed. What cannot be done with patience and cheerfulness? Those three weeks had seen more progress made than the three months before, and Basil's eyes danced with pleasure when he left off playing and stood waiting to hear what his mother would say.

She said nothing, but she drew him to her and kissed him tenderly, and Basil, peeping up half shyly—for somehow, as he told Blanche afterwards, “mother’s *pleased* kisses” always made him feel a little shy—saw a glimmer of tears in her eyes.

“You *are* pleased, mother?” he whispered, and another kiss was the answer. Then the young stranger came forward.

“Mr. Wildermann, I must thank you for all the trouble you have taken. I am more than pleased,” said Lady Iltyd warmly. “How have you succeeded so well? You have taught him more than his music—you have taught him to persevere, and to keep up heart in spite of difficulties.”

“He has taught himself, madame,” said Ulric eagerly, his face flushing. “It was his kind heart that gave him what he needed. Ah, Master Basil,” he went on, turning to his little pupil, “I must now tell the whole, and then it will be to say if you are still to continue your lessons.”

“The whole” was soon told, and it is easy to understand that it did not lessen Lady Iltyd’s pleasure. She had been glad to find her boy capable of real effort and determination—she was still more glad to find that the new motive which had prompted these was unselfish sympathy and kindness.

“I thank you *again*, Mr. Wildermann,” she said, when the young man had told her all, “you have, as I said, taught Basil more lessons than you knew. And your mother is happy to have so good a son.”

Better days began for the young music-master. Thanks to Basil’s mother and to Basil himself, for the boy became a pupil who would have done credit to any master, Ulric Wildermann gradually made his way in the neighbourhood he had chosen for his new home, and his old mother’s later days were passed in peace and comfort. He always counted Tarnworth his home, though as time went on he came to be well known as one of the first violinists of the day in London and others of the great capitals of Europe.

But sometimes when his success and popularity were at the highest, he would turn to the friend who had been his first pupil, and say half regretfully——

“You might excel me if you chose, Basil. I could sometimes find it in my heart to wish that you too had been born a poor boy with his way to make in the world.”

And Basil Iltyd would laugh as he told Ulric that his affection made him over-estimate his pupil's talent.

“Though, such as it is,” he added, “I have to thank you for having drawn it out, and added untold pleasure to my life.”

For though Basil had too many other duties to attend to for it to be possible for him to devote very much time to music, he never neglected it, and never forgot the gratitude he owed his mother for encouraging his boyish taste.

“Above all,” Lady Iltyd used often to say, “as in mastering the violin, you gained your first battle over impatience and want of perseverance.”

“My first, but not my last,” he would answer brightly. For Basil came to be known for steady, cheerful determination, which, after all, is worth many more brilliant gifts in the journey through life, which to even the most fortunate is uphill and rugged and perplexing at times.

THE REEL FAIRIES

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

LOUISA was a little girl of eight years old. That is to say, she was eight years old at the time I am going to tell you about. She was nothing particular to look at; she was small for her age, and her face was rather white, and her eyes were pretty much the same as other people's eyes. Her hair was dark brown, but it was not even curly. It was quite straight-down hair, and it was cut short, not *quite* so short as little boys' hair is cut now-a-days, but not very much longer. Many little girls had quite short hair at that time, but still there was something about Louisa's that made its shortness remarkable, if anything about her could have been remarkable! It was so very smooth and soft, and fitted into her head so closely that it gave her a small soft look, not unlike a mouse. On the whole, I cannot describe her better than by saying she was rather like a mouse, or like what you could fancy a mouse would be if it were turned into a little girl.

Louisa was not shy, but she was timid and not fond of putting herself forward; and in consequence of this, as well as from her not being at all what is called a “showy” child, she received very little notice from strangers, or indeed from many who knew her pretty well. People thought her a quiet, well-behaved little thing, and then thought no more about her. Louisa understood this in her own way, and sometimes it hurt her. She was not so unobservant as she seemed; and there were times when she would have very much liked a little more of the caressing, and even admiration, which she now and then saw lavished on other children; for though she was sensible in some ways, in others she was not wiser than most little people.

Her home was not in the country: it was in a street, in a

large and rather smoky town. The house in which she lived was not a *very* pretty one; but, on the whole, it was nice and comfortable, and Louisa was generally very well pleased with it, except now and then, when she got little fits of wishing she lived in some very beautiful palace sort of house, with splendid rooms, and grand staircases, and gardens, and fountains, and I don't know all *what*—just the same sort of little fits as she sometimes had of wishing to be very pretty and to have lovely dresses, and to be admired and noticed by every one who saw her. She never told anyone of these wishes of hers; perhaps if she had it would have been better, but it was not often that she could have found any one to listen to and understand her; and so she just kept them to herself.

There was one person who, I think, could have understood her, and that was her mother. But she was often busy and when not busy, often tired, for she had a great deal to do, and several other little children besides Louisa to take care of. There were two brothers who came nearest Louisa in age, one older and one younger, and two or three mites of children smaller still. The brothers went to school, and were so much interested in the things "little boys are made of," that they were apt to be rather contemptuous to Louisa because she was a girl, and the wee children in the nursery were too wee to think of anything but their own tiny pleasures and troubles. So you can understand that though she had really everything a little girl could wish for, Louisa was sometimes rather lonely and at a loss for companions, and this led to her making friends in a very odd way indeed. If you guessed for a whole year I do not think you would ever guess whom, or I should say *what*, she chose for her friends. Indeed, I fear that when I tell you you will hardly believe me; you will think I am "story-telling" indeed. Listen—it was not her doll, nor a pet dog, nor even a favourite pussy-cat—it was, they were rather, *the reels in her mother's workbox*.

Can you believe it? It is quite, quite true. I am not "making up" at all, and I will tell you how it came about. There was one part of the day, I dare say it was the hour that the nursery children were asleep, when it was convenient for Louisa to be sent down-stairs to sit beside her mother in the drawing-room, with many injunctions to be quiet. Her mother was generally writing or "doing accounts" at that time, and not at leisure to attend to her little girl; but when Louisa appeared at the door she would look up and say with a smile, "Well, dear, and what will you have to amuse yourself with to-day?" At first Louisa used to consider for a minute, and nearly every day she would make a different request.

"A piece of paper and a pencil to write," she would say on Monday perhaps, and on Tuesday it would be "The box with the chess, please," and on Wednesday something else. But after a while her answer came to be always the same—"Your big workbox to tidy, please, mamma."

Mamma smiled at the great need of tidying that had come over her big workbox, but she knew she could certainly trust Louisa not to *un*-tidy it, so she used just to push it across the table to her without speaking, and then for an hour at least nothing more was heard of Louisa. She sat quite still, fully as absorbed in her occupation as her mother was in hers, till at last the well-known tap at the door would bring her back from dream-land.

"Miss Louisa, your dinner is waiting," or "Miss Louisa, the little ones are quite ready to go out;" and, with a deep sigh, the workbox would be closed and the little girl would obey the unwelcome summons.

And next day, and the day after, and a great many days after that, it was always the same thing. But nobody knew anything about these queer friends of hers, except Louisa herself.

There were several families of them, and their names were as original as themselves. There were the Browns, reels of

brown wood wound with white cotton; as far as I remember there was a Mr. and Mrs. Brown and three children; the Browns were supposed to be quiet, respectable people, who lived in a large house in the country, but had nothing particularly romantic or exciting about them. There were the De Cordays, so named from the conspicuous mark of "three cord" which they bore. They were a set of handsome bone, or, as Louisa called it, *ivory* reels, and she added the "De" to their name to make it sound grander. There were two pretty little reels of fine China silk, whom she distinguished as the Chinese princesses. Blanche and Rose were their first names, to suit the colours they bore, for Louisa, you see, had learnt a little French already; and there were some larger silk reels, whom she called the "Lords and Ladies Flossy." Altogether there were between twenty and thirty personages in the workbox community, and the adventures they had, the elegance and luxury in which they lived, the wonderful stories they told each other, would fill more pages than I have time to write, or than you, kind little girls that you are, would have patience to read. I must hasten on to tell you how it came to pass that this queer fancy of Louisa's was discovered by other people.

One morning when she was sitting quietly, as usual, beside her mother, a friend of Mrs. —— no, we need not tell her name, I should like you best just to think of her as Louisa's mamma —well then, a friend of Louisa's mamma came to call. She was a lady who lived in the country several miles away from Smokytown, but she was very fond of Louisa's mamma, and whenever she had to come to Smokytown to shop, or anything of that kind, perhaps to take her little girl (for she too had a little girl as you shall hear) to the dentist's, she always came early to call on her friend. Louisa's mamma jumped up at once, when the servant threw open the door and announced the lady by name, and then they kissed each other, and then Louisa's mamma stooped down and kissed the lady's little girl who was standing



beside her, but Louisa sat so quietly at her corner of the table, that for a minute or two no one noticed her. She was just thinking if she could manage to creep down under the table and slip away out of the room without being seen, when her mamma called her.

“Louisa, my dear,” she said, “come here and speak to Mrs. Gordon and to Frances. You remember Frances, don’t you, dear?”

Louisa got down slowly off her chair and came to her mamma. She stood looking at Frances for a minute or two without speaking.

“Don’t you remember Frances?” said her mamma again.

“No,” said Louisa at last, “I don’t think I do.” Then she turned away as if she were going back to her place at the table. Her mamma looked vexed.

“Poor little thing,” said Mrs. Gordon, “she is only rather shy. Frances, you must make friends with her.”

“Louisa, I am not pleased with you,” said her mamma gravely, and then she went on talking to Mrs. Gordon.

Frances followed Louisa to the table, where all the reels were arranged in order. There was a grand feast going on among them that day; one of the Chinese princesses was to be married to one of the Lords Flossy, and Louisa had been smartening them up for the occasion. But she did not want to tell Frances about it.

“I am only playing with mamma’s workbox things,” she said, looking up at Frances, and wishing she had not come. She had taken a dislike to Frances, and the reason was not a very nice one—she was envious of her because she had such a pretty face and was very beautifully dressed. She had long curls of bright light hair, and large blue eyes, and she had a purple velvet coat trimmed with fur, and a sweet little bonnet with rosebuds in the cap, and Louisa’s mamma would never let her have rosebuds or any flowers in *her* bonnets. To Louisa’s eyes she looked almost as beautiful as a fairy princess, but the thought vexed her.

"Playing with your mamma's workbox things," said Frances, "how very funny! You poor little thing, have you got nothing else to play with?"

She spoke as if she were several years older than Louisa, and this made Louisa still more vexed.

"Yes," she answered, "of course I have got other things, but I like these. *You can't understand.*"

Frances smiled. "How funny you are!" she said again, "but never mind. Let us talk of something nice. Perhaps you would like to hear what things *I* have got to play with. I have a room all for myself, *filled* with toys. I have got a large doll-house, as tall as myself, with eight rooms; and I have sixteen dolls of different kinds. They were mostly birthday presents. But I am getting too big to care for them now. My birthday was last week. What *do* you think papa gave me? Something so beautiful that *I* had wanted for such a long time. I don't think you *could* guess."

In spite of herself Louisa was becoming interested. "I don't know, I'm sure," she said; "perhaps it was a book full of stories."

Frances shook her head. "O no," she answered, "it wasn't. *That* would be nothing particular, and my present *was* something particular, very particular indeed. Well, you can't guess, so I'll tell you—it was a Princess's dress; a *real* dress you know; a dress that *I* can put on and wear."

"A Princess's dress," repeated Louisa, opening her eyes.

"Yes, to be sure," said Francis. "I call it a Princess's dress, because it is copied from one the Princess Fair Star wore at the pantomime last Christmas. It was there I saw it, and I have teased papa ever since till he got it for me. And it is *so* beautiful; quite beautiful enough for a queen for that matter. My papa often calls me his queen, sometimes he says his golden-haired queen. Does yours?"

"No," said Louisa sadly; "my papa sometimes calls me his

pet, and sometimes he calls me 'old woman,' but he never says I am his queen. I suppose I am not pretty enough."

"I don't know," said Frances, consideringly, "I don't think you're ugly exactly. Perhaps if you asked your papa to get you a Princess's dress——"

"He wouldn't," said Louisa decidedly, "I know he wouldn't. It would not be the least use asking him. Tell me more about yours—what is it like, and does it make you feel like a real princess when you have it on?"

"I suppose it makes me *look* like one," replied Frances complacently, "and as for feeling, why one can always fancy, you know."

"Fancying isn't enough," said Louisa. "I know I should dreadfully like to *be* a princess or a queen. It is the first thing I would ask a fairy. Perhaps *you* don't wish it so much because every one pets you so, and thinks you so pretty. Has your dress got silver and gold on it?"

"O yes, at least it has silver—silver spots," began Frances eagerly, but just then her mamma turned to tell her that they must go. "The little people have made friends very quickly after all, you see," she said to Louisa's mamma. "Some day you must really bring Louisa to see Frances—it has been such an old promise."

"It is not often I can leave home for a whole day," said Louisa's mamma; "and then, dear, you must remember not having a carriage makes a difference."

Louisa's cheeks grew red. She felt very vexed with her mamma for telling Mrs. Gordon they had no carriage, but of course she did not venture to say anything, so no one noticed her. She was not sorry when Mrs. Gordon and Frances said good-bye and went away.

That same evening, a little before bed-time, Louisa happened to be again in the drawing-room alone with her mother.

"Louisa," said her mother, who was sewing at the table,

"you did not leave my workbox as neat as usual this morning. I suppose it was because you were interrupted by Frances Gordon. Come here, dear, and take the box and put it on a chair near the fire and arrange it rightly. Here is a whloe collection of reels rolling about. Put them all in their places."

Louisa did as she was told, but without speaking. Indeed she had been very silent all day, but her mother had been occupied with other things and had not noticed her particularly. Louisa quietly put the reels into their places, giving the most comfortable corners to her favourites as usual, and huddling some of the others together rather unceremoniously. Then she sat down on the hearth-rug, and began to think of what Frances Gordon had said to her, and to wish all sorts of not very wise things. She felt herself at last growing drowsy, so she leant her little round head on the chair beside her, and was almost asleep, when she heard her mother say, "Louisa, my dear, you are getting sleepy, you must really go to bed."

"Yes, mamma," she said, or intended to say, but the words sounded faint and dreamlike, and before they were fully pronounced she was fairly asleep!

She remembered nothing more for what seemed a very long time—then to her surprise she found herself already undressed and in her own little bed! "Nurse must have carried me upstairs and undressed me," she thought, and she opened her eyes very wide to see if it was still the middle of the night. No, surely it could not be; the room was quite light, yet where was the light coming from? It was not coming in at the window—there was no window to be seen; the curtains were drawn across, and no tiny chink even was visible; there was no lamp or candle in the room,—the light was simply there, but where it came from Louisa could not discover. She got tired of wondering about it at last, and was composing herself to sleep again, when suddenly a small but very clear voice called her by name. "Louisa, Louisa," it said. She did not feel at all

frightened. She half raised herself in bed and exclaimed, "Who is speaking to me? What do you want?"

"Louisa, Louisa," the voice repeated, "would you like to be a queen?"

"Very much indeed, thank you," Louisa replied promptly.

"Then rub your eyes and look about you," said the voice.

Louisa rubbed her eyes and looked about her to some purpose, for what *do* you think she saw? All the white counterpane of her little bed was covered with tiny figures, of various sizes, from one inch to three or four in height. They were hopping, and dancing, and twirling themselves about in every imaginable way, like nothing anybody ever saw before, or since, or ever will again.

"Fairies!" thought Louisa at once, and without any feeling of overwhelming surprise, for, like most children, she had always been hoping, and indeed half expecting, that *some day* an adventure of this kind would fall to her share.

"Yes, fairies," said the same voice as before, which seemed to hear her thoughts as distinctly as if she had spoken them; "but what kind of fairies? Look at us again, Louisa."

Louisa opened her eyes wider and stared harder. There were all kinds of fairies, gentleman and ladies, little and big; but as she looked she saw that every one of them, without exception, wore a curious sort of round stiff jacket, more like a little barrel than anything else. It gave them a queer high-shouldered look, very like the little figures of Noah and his family in toy arks; but as Louisa was staring at them the mystery was explained. A big, rather clumsy-looking gentleman fairy, stopped for a moment in his gymnastics, and Louisa read on the ledge round his shoulders the familiar words "Clark and Co.'s best six-cord, extra quality, No. 12."

"I know," she cried, clapping **her** hands; "you're mamma's reels!"

At these words a sensation ran through the company; they all stood stock-still, and Louisa began to feel a little afraid.

"She says," exclaimed the voice, "she says *we're her mamma's reels!*"

There fell a dead silence; Louisa expected to be sentenced to undergo capital punishment on the spot. "It's too bad," she said to herself, "it's too bad; they asked me to guess who they were."

"She says," continued the voice, "she says 'it's too bad.' *What* is too bad? My friends, let the deputation stand forward."

Instantly about a dozen fairies separated themselves from the others and advanced, slowly marching two and two up the counterpane, till having made their way across the various hills and valleys formed by Louisa's little figure under the bed-clothes, they drew up just in front of her nose. Foremost of the deputation she recognised, the one clad in pink satin, the other in glistening white, her two favourites the Princesses Blanche and Rose.

"Beautiful Louisa," said the deputation, all speaking at once, "we have come to ask you to be our queen."

"Thank you," said Louisa, not knowing what else to say.

"She consents!" exclaimed the deputation, "let the royal chariot appear."

Thereupon there suddenly started up in the middle of the bed, as large as life, but no larger, her mamma's big workbox! The fairies all clambered on to it with a rush, and hung upon it in every direction, like bees on a hive, or firemen on a fire-engine; and no sooner were they all mounted than the workbox slowly glided along till it was close to Louisa's face.

"Will your majesty please to get in?" said one of the fairies, "Clark's No. 12, extra quality," I think it was.

"How can I?" said Louisa piteously, "how can I? I'm far too big. How can I get into a workbox?"

"Please to rub your eyes and try," said the big fairy, "right foot foremost, if you please."

Louisa rubbed her eyes, and pulling her right foot out from under the clothes, stepped on to the workbox.

To her surprise, or rather not to her surprise, everything seemed to come quite naturally, she found that she was not at all too big, and she settled herself in the place the fairies had kept for her, the nice little division lined with satin, in which her mamma's thimble and emery cushion always lay. It was pretty comfortable, only rather hard, but Louisa had no time to think about that, for no sooner was she seated than off flew the workbox, that is to say the royal chariot, away, away, Louisa knew not where, and felt too giddy to try to think. It stopped at last as suddenly as it had started, and quick as thought all the fairies jumped down. Louisa followed them more deliberately. She found herself in a great shining hall, the walls seemed to be of looking-glass, but when she observed them more closely she found they were made of innumerable needles, all fastened together in some wonderful fairy fashion, which she had not time to examine, for just then the Chinese princesses approached her, carrying between them a glistening dress, which they begged her to put on. They were quite as tall as she by-the-by, so she allowed them to dress her, and then examined herself with great satisfaction in the looking-glass walls. The dress was lovely, of that there was no doubt; it was just such a one, curiously enough, as Frances Gordon had described; the only drawback was her short hair, which certainly did not add to her regal appearance.

"It won't show so much when your majesty has the crown on," said the Chinese princesses, answering as before to Louisa's unspoken thoughts. Then some gentlemen fairies appeared with the crown, which fitted exactly, only it felt rather heavy. But it would never do for a queen to complain, even in thought, of so trifling a matter, so with great dignity Louisa ascended

the throne which stood at one end of the hall, and sat down upon it to see what would come next.

The *Fairies* came next. One after the other, by dozens, and scores, and hundreds, they passed before her, each as he passed making the humblest of obeisances, as if to the Great Mogul himself. It was very fine indeed, but after a while Louisa began to get rather tired of it, and though the throne was very grand to look at, it too felt rather hard, and the crown grew decidedly heavier.

"I think I'd like to come down for a little," she said to some of the ladies and gentlemen beside her, but they took no notice. "I'd like to get down for a little and to take off my crown—it's hurting my head, and this spangly dress is *so* cold," she continued. Still the fairies took no notice.

"Don't you hear what I say?" she exclaimed again, getting angry; "what's the use of being a queen if you won't answer me?"

Then at last some of the fairies standing beside the throne appeared to hear what she was saying.

"Her majesty wishes to take a little exercise," said "Clark's No. 12," and immediately the words were repeated in a sort of confusing buzz all round the hall. "Her majesty wishes to take a little exercise"—"her majesty wishes to take a little exercise," till Louisa could have shaken them all heartily, she felt so provoked. Then suddenly the throne began to squeak and grunt (Louisa thought *it* was going to talk about her taking exercise next), and after it had given vent to all manner of unearthly sounds it jerked itself up, first on one side and then on the other, like a very rheumatic old woman, and at last slowly moved away. None of the fairies were pushing it, that was plain; and at first Louisa was too much occupied in wondering what made it move, to find fault with the mode of exercise permitted to her. The throne rolled slowly along, all round the hall, and wherever it appeared a crowd of fairies scuttled

away, all chattering the same words—"Her majesty is taking a little exercise," till at last, with renewed jerks and grunts and groans, her queer conveyance settled itself again in its old place. As soon as it was still, Louisa tried to get down, but no sooner did she put a foot on the ground than a crowd of fairies respectfully lifted it up again on to the footstool. This happened two or three times, till Louisa's patience was again exhausted.

"Get out of my way," she exclaimed, "you horrid little things, get out of my way; I want to get down and run about."

But the fairies took no notice of what she said, till for the third time she repeated it. Then they all spoke at once.

"Her majesty wants to take a little *more* exercise," they buzzed in all directions, till Louisa was so completely out of patience that she burst into tears.

"I won't stay to be your queen," she said, "it's not nice at all. I want to go home to my mamma. I want to go home to my mamma. I want to go home to my mamma."

"We don't know what mammas are," said the fairies. "We haven't anything of that kind here."

"That's a story," said Louisa. "There—are mammas here. I've seen several. There's Mrs. Brown, and there's Lady Floss, and there's—no, the Chinese princesses haven't a mamma. But you see there are two among my mamma's own reels in her workb——"

But before she could finish the word the fairies all set up a terrific shout. "The word, the word," they cried, "the word that no one must mention here. Hush! hush! hush!"

They all turned upon Louisa as if they were going to tear her to pieces. In her terror she uttered a piercing scream, and—woke.

She wasn't in bed; where was she? Could she be in the workbox? Wherever she was it was quite dark and cold, and something was pressing against her head, and her legs were aching. Suddenly there came a flash of light. Some one had

opened the door, and the light from the hall streamed in. The some one was Louisa's mamma.

"Who is in here? Did I hear some one calling out?" she exclaimed anxiously.

Louisa was slowly recovering her wits. "It was me, mamma," she answered; "I didn't know where I was, and I was so frightened and I am so cold. Oh mamma!"

A flood of tears choked her.

"You poor child," exclaimed her mamma, hurrying back to the hall to fetch a lamp, as she spoke, "why, you have fallen asleep on the hearthrug, and the fire's out; and my workbox—what is it doing here? Were you using it for a pillow?"

"No," said Louisa, eyeing the workbox suspiciously, "it was on the chair, and the corner of it has hurt my head, mamma; it was pressing against it."

Her mamma lifted the box on to the table.

"Are they all in there, mamma?" whispered Louisa, timidly.

"All in where? All who? What are you speaking about, my dear?"

"The fairies—the reels I mean," replied Louisa.

"My dear, you are dreaming still," said her mamma, laughing, but seeing that Louisa looked dissatisfied, "never mind, you shall tell me your dreams to-morrow. But just now you must really go to bed. It is nine o'clock—you have been two hours asleep. I went out of the room in a hurry, taking the lamp with me because it was not burning rightly, and then I heard baby crying—he is very cross to-night—and both nurse and I forgot about you. Now go, dear, and get well warmed at the nursery fire before you go to bed."

Louisa trotted off. She had no more dreams that night, but when she woke the next morning, her poor little legs were still aching. She had caught cold the night before, there was no doubt, so her mamma, taking some blame to herself for her having fallen asleep on the floor, was particularly kind

and indulgent to her. She brought her down to the drawing-room wrapped in a shawl, and established her comfortably in an arm-chair.

"What will you have to play with?" she asked. "Would you like my workbox?"

"I don't know," said Louisa, doubtfully. "Mamma," she continued, after a moment's silence, "can queens never do what they like?"

"Very often they can't," replied her mamma. "What makes you ask?"

"I dreamt I was a queen," said Louisa.

"Did you? What country were you queen of?"

"I was queen of the reel fairies," replied the child gravely. Her mother looked mystified.

"Tell me what you mean, dear," she said. "Tell me all about it."

So bit by bit Louisa explained the whole, and her mamma had for once a peep into that strange, fantastic, mysterious world, which we call a child's imagination. She had a glimpse of something else too. She saw that her little girl was in danger of getting to live too much alone, was in need of sympathy and companionship.

"I think it was what Frances Gordon said that made me dream about being a queen," she said.

"And do you still wish you were a queen?" said her mamma.

"No," said Louisa.

"A princess then?"

"No," she replied again. "But, mamma——"

"Well, dear?"

"I do wish sometimes that I was pretty, and that—that—I don't know how to say it—that people made a fuss about me sometimes."

Her mamma looked a little grave and a little sad; but still she smiled. She could not be angry—thought Louisa.

"Is it naughty, mamma?" she whispered.

"Naughty? No, dear; it is a wish most little girls have, I fancy—and big ones too. But some day you will understand how it might grow into a wrong feeling, and how on the other side a little of it may be useful to help good feelings. And till you understand better, dear, doesn't it make you happy to know that to me you could not be dearer if you were the most beautiful little princess in the world."

"As beautiful as Princess Fair Star, mamma?"

"Yes, or any other princess you can think of. I would rather have my little mouse of a girl than any of them."

Louisa nestled closer to her mamma with great satisfaction. "I like you to call me your mouse, mamma; and do you know I almost think I like having a cold."

Her mother laughed. "Am I making a little fuss about you? Is that what you like?"

Louisa laughed too.

"Do you think I should leave off playing with the reels, and making stories about them, mamma? Is it silly?"

"No, dear, not if it amuses you," said her mother.

But though Louisa did not leave off playing with the reels altogether, she gradually came to find that she preferred other amusements. Her mother taught her several pretty kinds of work, and read aloud stories to her more often than formerly. And, somehow, Louisa never again cared quite as much for her old friends. She thought the Chinese princesses had grown rather "stuck-up" and affected, and she could not get over a strong suspicion that "Clark's No. 12" was very ready to be impertinent, if he could ever again get a chance.

THE BLUE DWARF

AN ADVENTURE IN THÜRINGEN

“And then on the top of the Caldon Low
There was no one left but me.”

MARY HOWITT.

“I LIKED the blue dwarfs the best—far, far the best of anything,” said Olive.

“The blue dwarfs?” repeated Rex. “What *do* you mean? Why can’t you say what you mean plainly? Girls have such a stupid way of talking!”

“What can be plainer than *the blue dwarfs?*” said Olive rather snappishly, though, it must be allowed, with some reason. “We were talking about the things we liked best at the china place. *You* said the stags’ heads and the inkstands, and *I* say the blue dwarfs.”

“But I didn’t see any dwarfs,” persisted Rex.

“Well, I can’t help it if you didn’t. You had just as much chance of seeing them as I had. They were in a corner by themselves—little figures about two inches high, all with blue coats on. There were about twelve of them, all different, but all little dwarfs or gnomes. One was sitting on a barrel, one was turning head-over-heels, one was cuddling his knees—all funny ways like that. Oh, they were lovely!”

“I wish I had seen them better,” said Rex regretfully. “I do remember seeing a tray full of little blue-looking dolls, but I didn’t notice what they were.”

Olive did not at once answer. Her eyes were fixed on something she saw passing before the window. It was a very, very little man. He was not exactly hump-backed, but his figure was somewhat deformed, and he was so small that but for

the sight of his rather wizened old face one could hardly have believed he was a full-grown man. His eyes were bright and beady-looking, like those of a good-natured little weasel, if there be such a thing, and his face lighted up with a smile as he caught sight of the two, to him, strange-looking children at the open window of the little village inn.

“Good day,” he said, nodding to them; and “good day,” replied the children, as they had learnt to do by this time to everybody they met. For in these remote villages it would be thought the greatest breach of courtesy to pass any one without this friendly greeting.

Rex drew a long breath when the dwarf had passed.

“Olive——” he began, but Olive interrupted him.

“Rex,” she said eagerly, “that’s *exactly* like them—like the blue dwarfs, I mean. Only, of course, their faces were prettier—nice little china faces, rather crumpled looking, but quite nice; and then their coats were such a pretty nice blue. I think,” she went on consideringly—“I think, if I had that little man and washed his face *very* well, and got him a bright blue coat, he would look just like one of the blue dwarfs grown big.”

Rex looked at Olive with a queer expression.

“Olive,” he said in rather an awe-struck tone; “Olive, do you think perhaps they’re *real*? Do you think perhaps somewhere in this country—in those queer dark woods, perhaps—that there are real blue dwarfs, and that somebody must have seen them and made the little china ones like them? Perhaps,” and his voice dropped and grew still and solemn; “*perhaps*, Olive, that little man’s one of them, and they may have to take off their blue coats when they’re walking about. Do you know, I think it’s a little, just a very little frightening? Don’t you, Olive?”

“No, of course I don’t,” said Olive, and, to do her justice, her rather sharp answer was meant as much to reassure her little brother as to express any feeling of impatience. Rex was quite a little fellow, only eight, and Olive, who was nearly twelve,

remembered that when she was as little as that, she used sometimes to feel frightened about things which she now couldn't see anything the least frightening in. And she remembered how once or twice some of her big cousins had laughed at her, and amused themselves by telling her all sorts of nonsense, which still seemed terrible to her when she was alone in her room in the dark at night. "Of course there's nothing frightening in it," she said. "It would be rather a funny idea, I think. Of course it can't be, you know, Rex. There are no dwarfs, and gnomes, and fairies now."

"But that little man was a dwarf," said Rex.

"Yes, but a dwarf needn't be a fairy sort of person," explained Olive. "He's just a common little man, only he's never grown as big as other people. Perhaps he had a bad fall when he was a baby—that might stop his growing."

"Would it?" said Rex. "I didn't know that. I hope I hadn't a bad fall when I was a baby. Everybody says I'm very small for my age." And Rex looked with concern at his short but sturdy legs.

Olive laughed outright.

"Oh, Rex, what a funny boy you are! No, certainly, you are not a dwarf. You're as straight and strong as you can be."

"Well, but," said Rex, returning to the first subject, "I do think it's very queer about that little dwarf man coming up the street just as you were telling me about the blue dwarfs. And he *did* look at us in a funny way, Olive, whatever you say, just as if he had heard what we were talking about."

"All the people look at us in a funny way here," said Olive. "We must look very queer to them. Your sailor suit, Rex, and my 'Bolero' hat must look to them quite as queer as the women's purple skirts, with bright green aprons, look to us."

"Or the bullock-carts," said Rex. "Do you remember how queer we thought them at first. *Now* we've got quite used to seeing queer things, haven't we, Olive? Oh, now do look there

—at the top of the street—there, Olive, did you *ever* see such a load as that woman is carrying in the basket on her back? Why, it's as big as a house!"

He seemed to have forgotten about the dwarfs, and Olive was rather glad of it. These two children were travelling with their uncle and aunt in a rather out-of-the-way part of Europe. Out-of-the-way, that is to say, to most of the regular summer tourists from other countries, who prefer going where they are more sure of finding the comforts and luxuries they are accustomed to at home. But it was by no means out-of-the-way in the sense of being dull or deserted. It is a very busy part of the world indeed. You would be amazed if I were to tell you some of the beautiful things that are made in these bare, homely little peasant cottages. For all about in the neighbourhood there are great manufactories and warehouses for china and glass and many other things; and some parts of the work are done by the people at home in their own houses. The morning of the day of which I am telling you had been spent by the children and their friends in visiting a very large china manufactory, and their heads were full of the pretty and wonderful things they had seen.

And now they were waiting in the best parlour of the village inn while their uncle arranged about a carriage to take them all on to the small town where they were to stay a few days. Their aunt was tired, and was resting a little on the sofa, and they had planted themselves on the broad window-sill, and were looking out with amusement at all that passed.

"What have you two been chattering about all this time?" said their aunt, suddenly looking up. "I think I must have been asleep a little, but I have heard your voices going on like two birds twittering."

"Have we disturbed you, Auntie?" asked Olive, with concern.

"Oh, no, not a bit; but come here and tell me what you have been talking about."

Instantly Rex's mind went back to the dwarfs.

"Auntie," he said seriously, "perhaps you can tell me better than Olive can. Are there really countries of dwarfs, and are they a kind of fairies, Auntie?"

Auntie looked rather puzzled.

"Dwarfs, Rex?" she said; "countries of dwarfs? How do you mean?"

Olive hastened to explain. Auntie was very much amused.

"Certainly," she said, "we have already seen so many strange things in our travels that it is better not to be too sure what we may not see. But anyway, Rex, you may be quite easy in your mind, that if ever you come across any of the dwarfs, you will find them very good-natured and amiable, only you must be very respectful—always say 'Sir,' or 'My lord,' or something like that to them, and bow a great deal. And you must never seem to think anything they do the least odd, not even if they propose to you to walk on your head, or to eat roast fir-cones for dinner, for instance."

Auntie was quite young—not so very much older than Olive—and very merry. Olive's rather "grown-up" tones and manners used sometimes to tempt her to make fun of the little girl, which, to tell the truth, Olive did not always take quite in good part. And it must for Olive be allowed, that Auntie did sometimes allow her spirits and love of fun to run away with her a little too far, just like pretty unruly ponies, excited by the fresh air and sunshine, who toss their heads and gallop off. It is great fun at first and very nice to see, but one is sometimes afraid they may do some mischief on the way—without meaning it, of course; and, besides, it is not always so easy to pull them up as it was to start them.

Just as Auntie finished speaking the door opened and their uncle came in. He was Auntie's elder brother—a good deal older—and very kind and sensible. At once all thoughts of the dwarfs or what Auntie had been saying danced out of Rex's

curly head. Like a true boy he flew off to his uncle, besieging him with questions as to what sort of a carriage they were to go on in—*was* it an ox-cart; oh, mightn’t they *for once* go in an ox-cart, and might he—oh, might he sit beside the driver in front?

His uncle laughed and replied to his questions, but Olive stayed beside the sofa, staring gravely at her aunt.

“Auntie,” she said, “you’re not *in earnest*, are you, about there being really a country of dwarfs?”

Olive was twelve. Perhaps you will think her very silly to have imagined for a moment that her aunt’s joke could be anything but a joke, especially as she had been so sensible about not letting Rex get anything into his head which could frighten him. But I am not sure that she was so very silly after all. She had read in her geography about the Lapps and Finns, the tiny little men of the north, whom one might very well describe as dwarfs; there might be dwarfs in these strange Thuringian forests, which were little spoken of in geography books; Auntie knew more of such things than she did, for she had travelled in this country before. Then with her own eyes Olive had seen a dwarf, and though she had said to Rex that he was just an odd dwarf by himself as it were, not one of a race, how could she tell but what he might be one of a number of such queer little people? And even the blue dwarfs themselves—the little figures in the china manufactory—rather went to prove it than not.

“They may have taken the idea of dwarfs from the real ones, as Rex said,” thought Olive. “Anyway I shall look well about me if we go through any of these forests again. They must live in the forests, for Auntie said they eat roast fir-cones for dinner.”

All these thoughts were crowding through her mind as she stared up into Auntie’s face and asked solemnly—

“Auntie, were you *in earnest*?”

Auntie’s blue eyes sparkled.

“*In earnest*, Olive?” she said. “Of course! Why shouldn’t

I be in earnest? But come, quick, we must get our things together. Your uncle must have got a carriage."

"Yes," said he, "I have. *Not* an ox-cart, Rex. I'm sorry for your sake, but for no one else's; for I don't think there would be much left of us by the end of the journey if we were to be jogged along the forest roads in an ox-cart. No! I have got quite a respectable vehicle; but we must stop an hour or two on the way, to rest the horses and give them a feed, otherwise we could not get through to-night."

"Where shall we stop?" said Auntie, as with the bundles of shawls and bags they followed the children's uncle to the door.

"There is a little place in the forest, where they can look after the horses," said he; "and I dare say we can get some coffee there for ourselves, if we want it. It is a pretty little nook. I remember it long ago, and I shall be glad to see it again."

Olive had pricked up her ears. "A little place in the forest!" she said to herself; "that may be near where the dwarfs live: it is most likely not far from here, because of the one we saw." She would have liked to ask her uncle about it, but something in the look of her aunt's eyes kept her from doing so.

"Perhaps she *was* joking," thought Olive to herself. "But perhaps she doesn't know; *she* didn't see the real dwarf. It would be rather nice if I did find them, *then* Auntie couldn't laugh at me any more."

They were soon comfortably settled in the carriage, and set off. The first part of the drive was not particularly interesting; and it was so hot, though already afternoon, that they were all—Olive especially, you may be sure—delighted to exchange the open country for the pleasant shade of a grand pine forest, through which their road now lay.

"Is it a very large forest, Uncle?" said Olive.

"Yes, very large," he replied rather sleepily, to tell the truth; for both he and Auntie had been nodding a little, and Rex had once

or twice been fairly asleep. But Olive's imagination was far too hard at work to let her sleep.

"The largest in Europe?" she went on, without giving much thought to poor Uncle's sleepiness.

"Oh, yes, by far," he replied, for he had not heard clearly what she said, and fancied it was "the largest hereabouts."

"Dear me!" thought Olive, looking round her with awe and satisfaction. "If there are dwarfs anywhere, then it must be here."

And she was just beginning another. "And please, Uncle, is—?" when her aunt looked up and said lazily—

"Oh, my dear child, do be quiet! Can't you go to sleep yourself a little? We shall have more than enough of the forest before we are out of it." Which offended Olive so much that she relapsed into silence.

Auntie was a truer prophet than she knew; for when they got to the little hamlet in the wood, where they were to rest, something proved to be wrong with one of the horse's shoes; so wrong, indeed, that after a prolonged examination, at which all the inhabitants turned out to assist, it was decided that the horse must be re-shod before he could go any farther; and this made it impossible for the party who had come in the carriage to go any farther either. For the nearest smithy was two miles off; the horse must be led there and back by the driver, which would take at least two, if not three, hours. It was now past six, and they had come barely half way. The driver shook his head, and said he would not like to on to the town till morning. The horse had pricked his foot; it might cause inflammation to drive him farther without a rest, and the carriage was far too heavy for the other horse alone, which had suddenly struck the children's uncle as a brilliant idea.

"There would be no difficulty about the harnessing, anyway," he said to Auntie, laughing; "for all the vehicles hereabouts drawn by one horse have the animal at one side of a pole, instead of between shafts."

But Auntie thought it better to give in.

"It really doesn't much matter," she said; "we can stay here well enough. There are two bedrooms, and no doubt they can give us something to eat; beer and sausages and brown bread anyway."

And so it was settled, greatly to Olive's satisfaction; it would give her capital opportunities for a dwarf hunt! Though as to this she kept her own counsel.

The landlady of the little post-house where they had stopped was accustomed to occasional visits of this kind from benighted or distressed travellers. She thought nothing of turning her two daughters out of their bedroom, which, it must be owned, was very clean, for Auntie and Olive, and a second room on the ground-floor was prepared for Rex and his uncle. She had coffee ready in five minutes, and promised them a comfortable supper before bedtime. Altogether, everything seemed very satisfactory, and when they felt a little refreshed, Auntie proposed a walk—"a good long walk," she said, "would do us good. And the landlady says we get out of the forest up there behind the house, where the ground rises, and that there is a lovely view. It will be rather a climb, but it isn't more than three-quarters of an hour from here, and we have not walked all day."

Uncle thought it a good idea, and Rex was ready to start at once; but Olive looked less pleased.

"Don't you want to come, Olive?" said Auntie. "Are you tired? You didn't take a nap like the rest of us."

"I am a little tired," said Olive, which was true in one sense, though not in another, for she was quite fit for a walk. It struck her that her excuse was not quite an honest one, so she added, "If you don't mind, I would rather stay about here. I don't mind being alone, and I have my book. And I do so like the forest."

"Very well," said her uncle; "only don't lose yourself. She is perfectly safe," he added, turning to her aunt; "there are neither wolves, nor bears, nor robbers nowadays, in these peaceful forests."

So the three set off, leaving Olive to her own devices. She waited till they were out of sight, then she made her preparations.

“I’d better take my purse,” she said to herself, “in case I meet the dwarfs. Auntie told me to be very polite, and perhaps they would like some of these tiny pieces; they just look as if they were meant for them.” So she chose a few copper coins and one or two silver pieces, worth about twopence-halfpenny each, still smaller. Then she put in her pocket half a slice of the brown bread they had had with their coffee, and arming herself, more for appearance’ sake than anything else, with her parasol and the book she had with her in her travelling bag, she set off on her solitary ramble.

It was still hot—though the forest trees made a pleasant shade. Olive walked some way, farther and farther, as far as she could make out, into the heart of the forest, but in her inexperience she took no sort of care to notice the way she went, or to make for herself any kind of landmarks. She just wandered on and on, tempted first by some mysterious little path, and then by another, her mind full of the idea of the discoveries she was perhaps about to make. Now and then a squirrel darted across from one tree to another, disappearing among the branches almost before Olive could be sure she had seen it, or some wild wood birds, less familiar to the little foreigner, would startle her with a shrill, strange note. There were here and there lovely flowers growing among the moss, and more than once she heard the sound of not far off trickling water. It was all strangely beautiful, and she would greatly have enjoyed and admired it had not her mind been so full of the queer, fascinating idea of the blue dwarfs.

At last—she had wandered about for some time—Olive began to feel tired.

“I may as well sit down a little,” she thought; “I have lots of time to get back. This seems the very heart of the forest. They are just as likely to be seen here as anywhere else.”

So Olive ensconced herself in a comfortable corner, her back against the root of a tree, which seemed hollowed out on purpose to serve as an arm-chair. She thought at first she would read a little, but the light was already slightly waning, and the tree shadows

made it still fainter. Besides, Olive had plenty to think of—she did not require any amusement. Queer little noises now and then made themselves heard—once or twice it really sounded as if small feet were pattering along, or as if shrill little voices were laughing in the distance; and with each sound, Olive's heart beat faster with excitement—not with fear.

“If I sit very still,” she thought, “who knows what I may see? Of course, it would be much nicer and prettier if the dwarfs were quite tiny—not like the little man we saw in the street at that place—I forget the name—for he was not pretty at all—but like the blue dwarfs at the manufactory. But that, I suppose, is impossible, for they would be really like fairies. But they might be something between: not so big as the little man, and yet bigger than the blue dwarfs.”

And then Olive grew a little confused in trying to settle in her mind how big, or how small rather, it was possible or impossible for a nation of dwarfs to be. She thought it over till she hardly seemed sure what she was trying to decide. She kept saying to herself, “Anyway, they could not but be a good deal bigger than my thumb! What does that mean? Perhaps it means more in dwarf measures than in English, perhaps——”

But what was that that suddenly hit her on the nose? Olive looked up, a very little inclined to be offended; it is not a pleasant thing to be hit on the nose; could it be Rex come behind her suddenly, and playing her a trick? Just as she was thinking this, a second smart tap on the nose startled her still more, and this time there was no mistake about it; it came from above, and it was a fir-cone! Had it come of itself? Somehow the words, “Roast fir-cones for dinner,” kept running in her head, and she took up the fir-cone in her fingers to examine it, but quickly dropped it again, for it was as hot as a coal.

“It has a very roasty smell,” thought Olive; “where can it have come from?”

And hardly had she asked herself the question, when a sudden noise all round her made her again look up. They were sliding down the branches of the tree in all directions. At first, to her dazzled eyes, they seemed a whole army, but as they touched the ground one by one, and she was able to distinguish them better, she saw that after all there were not so *very* many. One, two, three, she began quickly counting to herself, not aloud, of course—that would not have been polite—one, two, three, up to twelve, then thirteen, fourteen, and so on up to—yes, there were just twenty-four of them.

“Two of each,” said Olive to herself; “a double set of the blue dwarfs.”

For they were the blue dwarfs, and no mistake! Two of each, as Olive had seen at once. And immediately they settled themselves in twos—two squatted on the ground embracing their knees, two strode across a barrel which they had somehow or other brought with them, two began turning head-over-heels, two knelt down with their heads and queer little grinning faces looking over their shoulders, twos and twos of them in every funny position you could imagine, all arranged on the mossy ground in front of where Olive sat, and all dressed in the same bright blue coats as the toy dwarfs at the china manufactory.

Olive sat still and looked at them. Somehow she did not feel surprised.

“How big are they?” she said to herself. “Bigger than my thumb? Oh, yes, a good deal. I should think they are about as tall as my arm would be if it was standing on the ground. I should think they would come up above my knee. I should like to stand up and measure, but perhaps it is better for me not to speak to them till they speak to me.”

She had not long to wait. In another moment two little blue figures separated themselves from the crowd, and made their way up to her. But when they were close to her feet they gave a sudden

jump in the air, and came down, not on their feet, but on their heads! And then again some of her aunt's words came back to her, "If they should ask you to stand on your head, for instance."

"Dear me," thought Olive, "how did Auntie know so much about them? But I do hope they won't ask me to stand on *my* head."

Her fears were somewhat relieved when the dwarfs gave another spring and came down this time in a respectable manner on their feet. Then, with a good many bows and flourishes, they began a speech.

"We are afraid," said the first.

"That the fir-cones," said the second.

"Were rather underdone," finished up the first.

Olive really did not know what to say. She was dreadfully afraid that it would seem so very rude of her not even to have *tasted* the cones. But naturally she had not the slightest idea that they had been intended for her to eat.

"I am very sorry," she said, "Mr.——, sir! my lord! I beg your pardon. I don't quite know what I should call you."

"With all respect," said the first.

"And considering the circumstances," went on the second.

Then just as Olive supposed they were going to tell her their names, they stopped short and looked at her.

"I beg your pardon," she began again, after waiting a minute or two to see if they had nothing else to say; "I don't quite understand."

"Nor do we," they replied promptly, speaking for the first time both together.

"Do you mean you don't know what *my* name is?" said she. "It's Olive, *Olive*!" for the dwarfs stood staring as if they had not heard her. "OLIVE!" she repeated for the third time.

"Green?" asked the first.

"No!" said Olive. "Of course not! *Green* is a very common name—at least——"

"But you called us 'blue,'" said the second; and it really was a relief to hear him finish a sentence comfortably by himself, only Olive felt very puzzled by what he said.

"How do you know?" she said. "How could you tell I called you the blue dwarfs?" and then another thought suddenly struck her. How very odd it was that the dwarf spoke such good English! "I thought you were German," she said.

"How very amusing!" said the dwarfs, this time again speaking together.

Olive could not see that it was very amusing, but she was afraid of saying so, for fear it should be rude.

"And about the fir-cones," went on the first dwarf. "It is distressing to think they were so underdone. But we have come, all of us," waving his hand in the direction of the others, "to invite you to supper in our village. There you will find them done to perfection."

Olive felt more and more uncomfortable.

"You are very kind," she said. "I should like to come very much, if it isn't too far; but I am afraid I couldn't eat any supper. Indeed, I'm not hungry." And then a bright thought struck her. "See here," she went on, drawing the half slice of bread out of her pocket, "I had to put this in my pocket, for I couldn't finish it at our afternoon coffee."

The two dwarfs came close and examined the piece of bread with the greatest attention. They pinched and smelt it, and one of them put out his queer little pointed tongue and licked it.

"Not good!" he said, looking up at Olive and rolling about his eyes in a very queer way.

"I don't know," said Olive; "I don't think it can be bad. It is the regular bread of the country. I should have thought you would be accustomed to it, as you live here."

The two dwarfs took no notice of what she said, but suddenly turned round, and standing with their backs to Olive called out shrilly, "Good day." Immediately all the other dwarfs replied

in the same tone and the same words, and to Olive's great surprise they all began to move towards her, but without altering their attitudes—those on the barrel rolled towards her without getting off it; the two who were hugging their knees continued to hug them, while they came on by means of jerking themselves; the turning head-over-heels ones span along like wheels, and so on till the whole assemblage were at her feet. Then she saw unfolded before her, hanging on the branches of the tree, a large mantle, just the shape of her aunt's travelling dust-cloak, which she always spread over Olive in a carriage, only, instead of being drab or fawn-colored, it was, like the dwarfs' jackets, bright blue. And without any one telling her, Olive seemed to know of herself that she was to put it on.

She got up and reached the cloak easily; it seemed to put itself on, and Olive felt very happy and triumphant as she said to herself, "Now I'm really going to have some adventures."

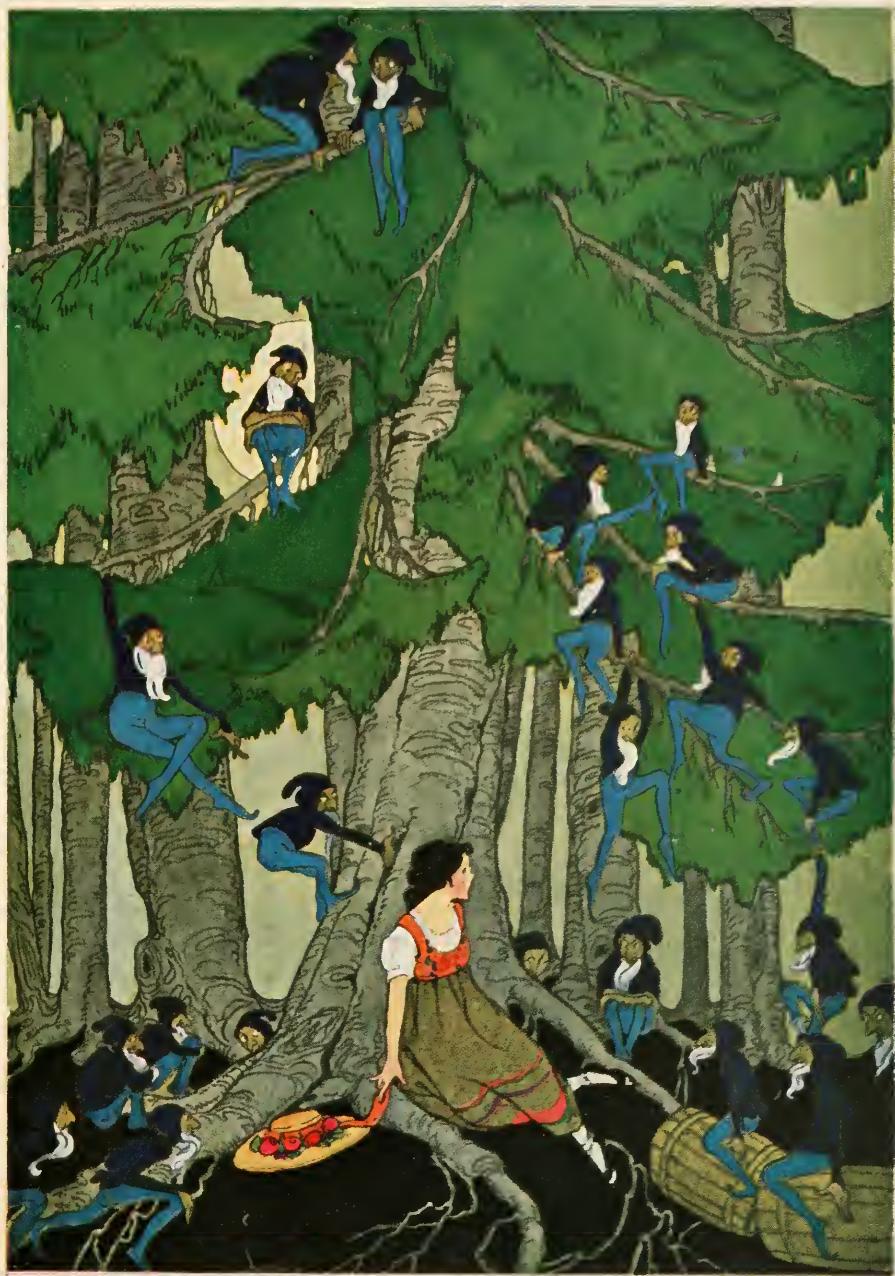
The dwarfs marched—no! one cannot call it marching, for they had about a dozen different ways of proceeding—they moved on, and Olive in the middle, her blue cloak floating majestically on her shoulders. No one spoke a word. It grew darker and darker among the trees, but Olive did not feel frightened. On they went, till at last she saw twinkling before them a very small but bright blue light. It looked scarcely larger than the lamp of a glow-worm, but it shone out very distinct in the darkness. Immediately they saw it the dwarfs set up a shout, and as it died away, to Olive's surprise, they began to sing. And what do you think they sang? Olive at first could hardly believe her ears as they listened to the thoroughly English song of "Home, Sweet Home." And the queerest thing was that they sang it very prettily, and that it sounded exactly like her aunt's voice! And though they were walking close beside her, their voices when they left off singing did not so much seem to stop as to move off, to die away into the distance, which struck Olive as very odd.

They had now arrived at the trunk of a large tree, half way

up which hung the little lamp—at least Olive supposed it must be a lamp—from which came the bright blue light.

“Here we are,” said one of the dwarfs, she did not see which, “at the entrance to our village.” And thereupon all the dwarfs began climbing up the tree, swarming about it like a hive of bees, till they got some way up, when one after another they suddenly disappeared. Olive could see all they did by the blue light. She was beginning to wonder if she would be left standing there alone, when a shout made her look up, and she saw two dwarfs standing on a branch holding a rope ladder, which they had just thrown down, and making signs to her to mount up by it. It was quite easy; up went Olive, step by step, and when she reached the place where the two dwarfs were standing, she saw how it was that they had all disappeared. The tree trunk was hollow, and there were steps cut in it like a stair, down which the dwarfs signed to her that she was to go. She did not need to be twice told, so eager was she to see what was to come. The stair was rather difficult for her to get down without falling, for the steps were too small, being intended for the dwarfs, but Olive managed pretty well, only slipping now and then. The stair seemed very long, and as she went farther it grew darker, till at last it was quite dark; by which time, fortunately, however, she felt herself again on level ground, and after waiting half a minute a door seemed to open, and she found herself standing outside the tree stair, with the prettiest sight before her eyes that she had ever seen or even imagined.

It was the dwarf village! Rows and rows of tiny houses—none of them more than about twice as high as Olive herself, for that was quite big enough for a dwarf cottage, each with a sweet little garden in front, like what one sees in English villages, though the houses themselves were like Swiss chalets. It was not dark down here, there was a soft light about as bright as we have it at summer twilight; and besides this each little house had a twinkling blue light hanging above the front door, like a sign-



post. And at the door of each cottage stood one of the dwarfs, with a little dwarf wife beside him; only, instead of blue, each little woman was dressed in brown, so that they were rather less showy than their husbands. They all began bowing as Olive appeared, and all the little women curtseying, and Olive seemed to understand, without being told, that she was to walk up the village street to see all there was to be seen. So on she marched, her blue cloak floating about her, so that sometimes it reached the roofs of the houses on each side at the same time.

Olive felt herself rather clumsy. Her feet, which in general she was accustomed to consider rather neat, and by no means too large for her age, seemed such great awkward things. If she had put one of them in at the window of a dwarf house, it would have knocked everything out of its place.

“Dear me!” thought Olive, “I had no idea *I* could seem clumsy! I feel like a great ploughman. I wish *I* were not so big.”

“Yes,” said a voice beside her, “it has its disadvantages”; and Olive, looking down to see who spoke—she had to look down for everything—caught sight of one of the two dwarfs with whom she had first spoken. She felt a little ruffled. She did not like this trick of the dwarf hearing what she thought before she said it.

“Everything has its disadvantages,” she replied. “Don’t you find yourself very inconveniently small when you are up in *our* world?”

“Exactly so,” said the dwarf; but he did not seem the least put out.

“They are certainly very good-tempered,” said Olive to herself. Then suddenly a thought struck her.

“Your village is very neat and pretty,” she said; “though, perhaps—I don’t mean to be rude, not on any account——”

“No,” interrupted the dwarf; “Auntie told you on no account to be rude.”

"Auntie!" repeated Olive, in astonishment; "she is not *your* auntie!"

"On no account," said the dwarf, in the same calm tone, but without seeming to take in that Olive meant to reprove him.

"It's no use trying to make them understand," said Olive to herself.

"Not the least," said the dwarf; at which Olive felt so provoked that she could have stamped her feet with irritation. But as *thinking* crossly seemed in this country to be quite as bad as *speaking* crossly, she had to try to swallow down her vexation as well as she could!

"I was going to say," she went on quietly, "that to my taste the village would be prettier if there was a little variety. Not all the houses just the same, you know. And all of *you* are so like each other, and all your little brown wives too. Are there no *children* dwarfs?"

"Doubtless. Any quantity," was the answer.

"Then where are they all?" said Olive. "Are they all asleep?" She put the last question rather sarcastically, but the sarcasm seemed to be lost on the little man.

"Yes, all asleep," he replied; "all asleep, and dreaming. Children are very fond of dreaming," he went on, looking up at Olive with such a queer expression, and such a queer tone in his voice, too, that Olive got a queer feeling herself, as if he meant more than his words actually said. Could he mean to hint that *she* was dreaming? But a remark from the dwarf distracted her thoughts.

"Supper is ready," he said. "They are all waiting." And turning round, Olive saw before her a cottage a good deal larger than the others; in fact, it was almost high enough for her, with considerable stooping, to get in at the door. And through the windows she saw a long table neatly covered with a bright blue table-cloth, and spread with numbers of tiny plates, and beside each plate a knife and fork and a little blue glass cup. Two great

dishes stood on the table, one at each end. Steam was rising from each, and a delicious smell came out through the open windows.

"I did not know I was so hungry," thought Olive; "but I do hope it isn't fir-cones."

"Yes," said the dwarf; "they'll be better done this time."

Then he gave a sort of sharp, sudden cry or whistle, and immediately all the dwarfs of the village appeared as if by magic, and began hurrying into the house, but as soon as they were in the middle of the passage they fell back at each side, leaving a clear space in the middle.

"For you," said the first dwarf, bowing politely.

"Do you always have supper here all together like that? said Olive. "How funny!"

"Not at all," said the dwarf; "it's a table d'hote. Be so good as to take your place."

Olive bent her head cautiously in preparation for passing through the door, when again the same sharp cry startled her, and lifting her head suddenly she bumped it against the lintel. The pain of the blow was rather severe.

"What did you do that for?" she exclaimed angrily. "Why did you scream out like that? I——" but she said no more. The cry was repeated, and this time it did its work effectually, for Olive awoke. Awoke—was it waking?—to find herself all in the dark, stiff and cold, and her head aching with the bump she had given it against the old tree-trunk, while farther off now she heard the same shrill hoot or cry of some early astir night-bird, which had sounded before in her dreams.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she sobbed, "what shall I do? Where am I? How can I ever find my way in the dark? I believe it was all a trick of those nasty blue dwarfs. I don't believe I was dreaming. They must be spiteful goblins. I wish I had not gone with them to see their village." And so for some minutes, half asleep and half awake, Olive stayed crouching by the tree, which seemed her only protector. But by degrees, as her senses—her

common sense particularly—came back to her, she began to realise that it was worse than useless to sit there crying. Dark as it was, she must try to find her way back to the little inn, where, doubtless, Auntie and the others were in the greatest distress about her, the thought of which nearly made her burst out crying again; and poor Olive stumbled up to her feet as best she could, fortunately not forgetting to feel for her book and parasol which were lying beside her, and slowly and tremblingly made her way on a few steps, hoping that perhaps if she could manage to get out of the shadow of the trees it might not be quite so dark farther on. She was not altogether disappointed. It certainly grew a very little less black, but that it was a very dark night there was no denying. And, indeed, though it had not been dark, she would have had the greatest difficulty in finding her way out of the wood, into which she had so thoughtlessly penetrated. Terrifying thoughts, too, began to crowd into her mind, though, as I think I have shown you, she was not at all a timid child. But a forest on a dark night, and so far away from everywhere—it was enough to shake her nerves. She hoped and trusted there was no fear of wolves in summer-time; but bears!—ah! as to bears there was no telling. Even the hooting cries of the birds which she now and then again heard in the distance frightened her, and she felt that a bat flapping against her would send her nearly out of her mind. And after a while she began to lose heart—it was not quite so dark, but she had not the very least idea where she was going. She kept bumping and knocking herself against the trunks; she was evidently not in a path, but wandering farther and farther among the forest trees. That was about all she could feel sure of, and after two or three more vain efforts Olive fairly gave up, and, sinking down on the ground, again burst into tears.

“If I but had a mariner’s compass,” she thought, her fancy wandering off to all the stories of lost people she had ever heard of. Then she further reflected that a compass would do her very little good if it was too dark to see it, and still more as she had

not the slightest idea whether her road lay north, south, east or west. "If the stars were out!" was her next idea; but then, I am ashamed to say, Olive's ideas of astronomy were limited. She could perhaps have recognized the Plough and the Pole star, but she could not remember which way they pointed. Besides, she did not feel quite sure that in Thuringen one would see the same stars as in England or Paris; and after all, as there were none visible, it was no good puzzling about it, only if they *had* been there it would not have seemed so lonely. Suddenly—what was that in the distance? A light, a tiny light, bobbing in and out of sight among the trees? Could it be a star come out of its way to take pity on her? Much more likely a Will-o'-the-wisp; for she did not stop to reflect that a dry pine forest in summer-time is not one of Will-o'-the-wisp's favourite playgrounds. It was a light, as to that there was no doubt, and it was coming nearer. Whether she was more frightened or glad Olive scarcely knew. Still, almost anything was better than to sit there to be eaten up by bears, or to die of starvation; and she eagerly watched the light now steadily approaching her, till it came near enough for her to see that it was a lantern carried by some person not high above the ground. A boy perhaps; could it be—oh, joyful thought!—could it be Rex? But no; even if they were all looking for her it was not likely that they would let Rex be running about alone to get lost, too. Still it must *be* a boy, and without waiting to think more Olive called out—

"Oh, please come and help me! I'm lost in the wood!" she cried, thinking nothing of German or anything but her sore distress.

The lantern moved about undecidedly for a moment or two, then the light flashed towards her and came still nearer.

"*Ach, Gott!*" exclaimed an unfamiliar voice, and Olive, peering forward, thought for half a second she was again dreaming. He was not, certainly, dressed in blue, and he was a good deal taller than up to her knee; but still he was—there was no doubt about it

—he was a dwarf! And another gaze at his queer little figure and bright sparkling eyes told Olive that it was the very same little man who had smiled at Rex and her when he saw them leaning out of the inn window that very afternoon.

She didn't feel frightened; he looked so good-natured and so sorry for her. And somehow Olive's faith in the possible existence of a nation of dwarfs had received a shock; she was much more inclined to take things prosaically. But it was very difficult to explain matters. I think the dwarf at the first moment was more inclined to take *her* for something supernatural than she was now to imagine him a brownie or a gnome. For she was a pretty little girl, with a mass of golden fair hair and English blue eyes; and with her hat half fallen off, and her cheeks flushed, she might have sat for a picture of a fairy who had strayed from her home.

Her German seemed all to go out of her head. But she managed to remember the name of the village where they had been that afternoon, and a sudden recollection seemed to come over the dwarf. He poured out a flood of words and exclamations, amidst which all that Olive could understand was the name of the village and words which she knew meant "lost" and "poor child." Then he went on to tell that he too was on his way from the same village to somewhere; that he came by the woods, because it was shorter, and lifting high his lantern, gave Olive to understand that he could now show her the way.

So off she set under his guidance, and, only fancy, a walk of not more than ten minutes brought them to the little inn! Olive's wanderings and straying had, after all, drawn her very near her friends if she had known it. Poor Auntie and Rex were running about in front of the house in great distress. Uncle and the landlord and the coachman had set off with lanterns, and the landlady was trying to persuade Auntie that there was not *really* anything to be afraid of; neither bears, nor wolves, nor evilly-disposed people about: the little young lady had, doubtless, fallen asleep in the wood with the heat and fatigue of the day; which, as you know,

was a very good guess, though the landlady little imagined what queer places and people Olive had been visiting in her sleep.

The dwarf was a well-known person thereabouts, and a very harmless, kindly little man. A present of a couple of marks sent him off to his cottage nearby very happy indeed, and when Uncle returned a few minutes later to see if the wanderer had been heard of, you can imagine how thankful he was to find her. It was not so *very* late after all, not above half-past ten o'clock, but a thunder-storm which came on not long after explained the unusual darkness of the cloud-covered sky.

"*What* a good thing you were safe before the storm came on!" said Auntie, with a shudder at the thought of the dangers her darling had escaped. "I will take care never again to carry my jokes too far," she resolved, when Olive had confided to her the real motive of her wanderings in the wood. And Olive, for her part, decided that she would be content with fairies and dwarfs in books and fancy, without trying to find them in reality.

"Though all the same," she said to herself, "I should have liked to taste the roast fir-cones. They did smell so good!" "And, Auntie," she said aloud, "were you singing in the wood on your way home with Uncle and Rex?"

"Yes," said Auntie, "they begged me to sing 'Home, Sweet Home.' Why do you ask me?"

Olive explained. "So it was *your* voice I heard when I thought it was the dwarfs," she said, smiling.

And Auntie gave her still another kiss.

GOOD-NIGHT, WINNY

“Say not good-night—but, in some brighter clime,
Bid me good-morning!”

WHEN I was a little girl I was called Meg. I do not mean to say that I have got a different name now that I am big, but my name is *used* differently. I am now called Margaret, or sometimes Madge, but never Meg. Indeed I do not wish ever to be called Meg, for a reason you will quite understand when you have heard my story. But perhaps I am wrong to call it a “story” at all, so I had better say at the beginning that what I have to tell you is only a sort of remembrance of something that happened to me when I was very little—of some one I loved more dearly, I think, than I can ever love any one again. And I fancy perhaps other little girls will like to hear it.

Well then, to begin again—long ago I used to be called Meg, and the person who first called me so was my sister Winny, who was not quite two years older than I. There were four of us then—four little sisters—Winny, and I, and Dolly, and Blanche, baby Blanche we used to call her. We lived in the country in a pretty house, which we were very fond of, particularly in the summer time, when the flowers were all out. Winny loved flowers more dearly than any one I ever knew, and she taught me to love them too. I never see one now without thinking of her and the things she used to say about them. I can see now, now that I am so much older, that Winny must have been a very clever little girl in some ways, not so much in learning lessons as in thinking things to herself, and understanding feelings and thoughts that children do not generally care about at all. She was very pretty too, I can remember her face so well. She had blue eyes and very long black eyelashes—our mamma used to tease her sometimes, and say that she had what Irish people call “blue eyes put in with dirty fingers”—and pretty rosy cheeks, and a very white

forehead. And her face always had a bright dancing look that I can remember best of all.

We learnt lessons together, and we slept together in two little beds side by side, and we did everything together, from eating our breakfast to dressing our dolls—and when one was away the other seemed only half alive. All our frocks and hats and jackets were exactly the same, and except that Winny was taller than I, we should never have known which was which of our things. I am sure Winny was a very good little girl, but when I try to remember all about her exactly, what seems to come back most to me is her being always so happy. She did not need to think much about being good and not naughty; everything seemed to come rightly to her of itself. She thought the world was a very pretty, nice place; and she loved all her friends, and she loved God most of all for giving them to her. She used to say she was sure Heaven would be a very happy place too, only she did so hope there would be plenty of flowers there, and she was disappointed because mamma said it did not tell in the Bible what kinds of flowers there would be. Almost the only thing which made her unhappy was about there being so many very poor people in the world. She used to talk about it very often and wonder why it was, and when she was very, very little, she cried because nurse would not let her give away her best velvet jacket to a poor little girl she saw on the road.

But though Winny was so sweet, and though we loved each other so, sometimes we did quarrel. Now and then it was quite little quarrels which were over directly, but once we had a bigger quarrel. Even now I do not like to remember it; and oh! how I do wish I could make other boys and girls feel as I do about quarrelling. Even little tiny squabbles seem to me to be sorrowful things, and then they so often grow into bigger ones. It was generally mostly my fault. I was peevish and cross sometimes, and Winny was never worse than just

hasty and quick for a moment. She was always ready to make friends again, "to kiss ourselves to make the quarrel go away," as our little sister Dolly used to say, almost before she could speak. And sometimes I was silly, and then it was right for Winny to find fault with me. My manners used occasionally to trouble her, for she was very particular about such things. One day I remember she was very vexed with me for something I said to a gentleman who was dining with our papa and mamma. He was a nice kind gentleman, and we liked him, only we did not think him pretty. Winny and I had fixed together that we did not think him pretty, only of course Winny never thought I would be so silly as to *tell* him so. We came down to dessert that evening—Winny sat beside papa, and I sat between Mr. Merton and mamma, and after I had sat quite still, looking at him without speaking, I suddenly said,—I can't think what made me—"Mr. Merton, I don't think you are at all pretty. Your hair goes straight down, and up again all of a sudden at the end, just like our old drake's tail."

Mr. Merton laughed very much, and papa laughed, and mamma did too, though not so much. But Winny did not laugh at all. Her face got red, and she would not eat her raisins, but asked if she might keep them for Dolly, and she seemed quite unhappy. And when we had said good-night, and had gone upstairs, I could see how vexed she was. She was so vexed that she even gave me a little shake. "Meg," she said, "I am so ashamed of you. I am really. How could you be so rude?"

I began to cry, and I said I did not mean to be rude; and I promised that I would never say things like that again; and then Winny forgave me; but I never forgot it. And once I remember, too, that she was vexed with me because I would not speak to a little girl who came to pay a visit to her grandfather, who lived at *our* grandfather's lodge. Winny stopped to say good-morning to her, and to ask her if her friends at

home were quite well; and the little girl curtseyed and looked so pleased. But I walked on, and when Winny called to me to stop I would not; and then, when she asked me what was the matter, I said I did not think we needed to speak to the little girl, she was quite a common child, and we were ladies. Winny *was* vexed with me then; she was too vexed to give me a little shake even. She did not speak for a minute, and then she said, very sadly, "Meg, I *am* sorry you don't know better than that what being a lady means."

I do know better now, I hope; but was it not strange that Winny *always* seemed to know better about these things? It came of itself to her, I think, because her heart was so kind and happy.

Winny was very fond of listening to stories, and of making them up and telling them to me; but she was not very fond of reading to herself. She liked writing best, and I liked reading. We used to say that when we were big girls, Winny should write all mamma's letters for her, and I should read aloud to her when she was tired. How little we thought that time would *never* come! We were always talking about what we should do when we were big; but sometimes when we had been talking a long time, Winny would stop suddenly, and say, "Meg, growing big seems a dreadfully long way off. It almost tires me to think of it. What a great, great deal we shall have to learn before then, Meg!" I wonder what gave her that feeling.

Shall I tell you now about the worst quarrel we ever had? It was about Winny's best doll. The doll's name was "Poupee." Of course I know now that that is the French for all dolls; but we were so little then we did not understand, and when our aunt's French maid told us that "poupee" was the word for doll, we thought it a very pretty name, and somehow the doll was always called by it. Grandfather had given Poupee to Winny—I think he brought it from London for her—and I cannot tell you how proud she was of it.

She did not play with it every day, only on holidays and treat-days; but every day she used to peep at Poupee in the drawer where she lay, and kiss her, and say how pretty she looked. One afternoon Winny was going out somewhere—I don't remember exactly where; I dare say it was a drive with mamma—and I was not to go, and I was crying; and just as Winny was running downstairs all ready dressed to go, she came back and whispered to me, "Meg, dear, don't cry. It takes away all my pleasure to see you. Will you leave off crying and look happy if I let you have Poupee to play with while I am out?"

I wiped away my tears in a minute, I *was* so pleased. Winny ran to Poupee's drawer and got her out, and brought her to me. She kissed her as she put her into my arms, and said to her, "My darling Poupee you are going to spend the afternoon with your aunt. You must be a very good little girl, and do exactly what she tells you."

And then Winny said to me, "You *will* be very careful of her, won't you, Meg?" and I promised, of course, that I would.

I did mean to be careful, and I really was; but for all that a sad accident happened. I had been very happy with Poupee all the afternoon, and I had made her a new apron with a piece of muslin nurse gave me, and some ribbon, which did nicely for bows; and I was carrying her along the passage to show nurse how pretty the apron looked when the house-maid, who was coming along with a trayful of clean clothes from the wash in her arms, knocked against me, and Poupee was thrown down; and, terrible to tell, her dear, sweet little right foot was broken. I cannot tell you how sorry I was, and nurse was sorry too, and so was Jane; but all the sorrow would not mend the foot. I was sitting on the nursery floor, with Poupee in my lap, crying over her, as miserable as could be, when Winny rushed in, laden with parcels, in the highest spirits.

"O! I have had such a nice drive, and I have brought some buns and sponge-cakes for tea, and a toy donkey for Blanche. And has Poupee been good?" she exclaimed. But just then she caught sight of my face. "What is the matter, Meg? What *have* you done to my darling, beautiful Poupee? O Meg, Meg, you surely haven't broken her?"

I was crying so I could hardly speak.

"O Winny!" I said, "I am so sorry."

But Winny was too vexed to care just at first for anything I could say. "You naughty, naughty, unkind Meg," she said, "I do believe you did it on purpose."

I could not bear to hear that. I thought it very hard indeed that she should say so, when any one could see how miserable I was. I did not answer her; I ran out of the nursery, and though Winny called to me to come back (for the moment she had said those words she was sorry for them), I would not listen to her. Nurse fetched me back soon, however, for it was tea-time, but I would not speak to Winny. We never had such a miserable tea; there we sat, two red-eyed, unhappy little girls, looking as if we did not love each other a bit. If mamma had come up to the nursery she would have put it all right—she did put Poupee's foot right the very next day, she mended it so nicely with diamond cement, that the place hardly showed at all—but she was busy that evening, and did not happen to come up. So bed-time came, and still we had not made friends, though I heard Winny crying when she was saying her prayers. After we were in bed, and nurse had gone away, Winny whispered to me, "Meg, won't you forgive me for saying that unkind thing? Won't you kiss me and say good-night, Winny?"

A minute before, I had been feeling as sorry as could be, but when Winny spoke to me, a most hard, horrid, unkind feeling seemed to come back into my heart, and I would not answer. I breathed as if I were asleep, pretending not to hear.

I think Winny thought I was asleep, for she did not speak again. I heard her crying softly, and then after a while I heard by her breathing that she had really gone to sleep. But I couldn't. I lay awake for a long time, I thought it was hours and hours, and I tossed and turned, but I *couldn't* go to sleep. I listened but I could not hear Winny breathing—I put my hand out of my cot, and stretched across to hers to feel for her; she seemed to be lying quite still. Then a dreadful feeling came into my mind—suppose Winny were dead, and that I had refused to make friends and say good-night! I must have got fanciful with lying awake, I suppose, and you know I was only a very little girl. I could not bear it—I stretched myself across to Winny and put my arms round her.

“Winny! Winny!” I said, “wake up, Winny, and kiss me, and let us say good-night.”

Winny woke up almost immediately, and she seemed to understand at once.

“Poor little Meg,” she said, “poor little Meg. We will never be unkind to each other again—never. Good-night, dear Meg.”

“Good-night, Winny,” I said. And just as I was falling asleep I whispered to her—“I will never let you go to sleep again, Winny, without saying good-night.” And I never did, never except *once*.

I could tell you ever so many other things about Winny, but I dare say you would be tired, for, of course, they cannot be so interesting to any other little girls as to me. But I think you will wish to hear about our last good-night.

Have I told you about our aunts at all? We had two aunties we were very fond of. They were young and merry and so kind to us, and there was nothing we liked so much as going to stay with them, for their home—our grandfather’s—was not far away. We generally all went there to spend Christmas, but one year something, I forgot what, had pre-

vented this, so to make up for it we were promised to spend Easter with them. We did so look forward to it—we were to go by ourselves, just like young ladies going to pay a visit, and we were to stay from Saturday till Easter Monday or Tuesday.

On the Saturday morning we woke up so early—hours before it was time to be dressed—we were so excited about our visit. But somehow Winny did not seem quite as happy about it as I wanted her to be. I asked her what made her dull, and she said it was because she did not like leaving papa and mamma, and Dolly and Blanche, not even for two or three days. And when we went into mamma's room to say good-morning as usual, Winny said so to her too. Mamma laughed at her a little, and said she was a great baby after all; and Winny smiled, but still she seemed dull, and I shall never forget what a long, long kiss she gave mamma that morning, as if she could not bear to let go of her.

When we went to the nursery for breakfast, baby Blanche was crying very much, and nurse said she was very cross. She did not think she was quite well, and we must be good and quiet. After breakfast, when mamma came to see baby, she seemed anxious about her, but baby went to sleep before long quite comfortably, and then nurse said she would be better when she awoke; it was probably just a little cold. And very soon the pony carriage was ready for Winny and me, and we kissed them all and set off on our visit. I was in high spirits, but as we drove away I saw that Winny was actually crying a little, and she did not often cry.

When we got to our aunties', however, she grew quite happy again. We were very happy indeed on Sunday, only Winny kept saying how glad she would be to see them all at home again on Monday or Tuesday. But on Monday morning there came a letter, which made our aunties look grave. They did not tell us about it till Winny asked if we were to go home "to-day," and then they told us that perhaps we could

not go home for several days—not for two or three weeks even, for poor baby Blanche was very ill, and it was a sort of illness we might catch from her if we were with her.

“And that would only add to your poor mamma’s trouble,” said our aunties; “so you see, dears, it is much the best for you to stay here.”

I did not mind at all; indeed I was pleased. I was sorry about baby, but not very, for I thought she would soon be better. But Winny looked very sad.

“Aunty,” she said, “you don’t think poor baby will *die*, do you?”

“No, dear; I hope she will soon be better,” said aunty, and then Winny looked happier.

“Meg,” she whispered to me, “we must be sure to remember about poor baby being ill when we say our prayers.” And we fixed that we would.

After that we were very happy for two or three weeks. Sometimes we were sorry about baby and Dolly, for baby was very ill we were told, and Dolly had caught the fever too. But after a while news came that they were both better, and we began to look forward to seeing papa and mamma and them again. We used to write little letters to them all at home, and that was great fun; and we used to go such nice walks. The fields and lanes were full of daffodils, and soon the primroses came and the violets, and Winny was *always* gathering them and making wreaths and nosegays. It was a very happy time, and it all comes back into my mind *dreadfully*, when I see the spring flowers, especially the primroses, every year.

One day we had had a particularly nice walk, and when we came in Winny seemed so full of spirits that she hardly knew what to do with herself. We had a regular romp. In our romping, by accident, Winny knocked me down, for she was very strong, and I hurt my thumb. I was often silly about

being hurt even a little, and I began to cry. Then Winny was so sorry; she kissed me and petted me, and gave me all her primrose wreaths and nosegays, so I soon left off crying. But somehow Winny's high spirits had gone away. She shivered a little and went close to the fire to get warm, and soon she said she was tired, and we both went to bed. I remember that night so well. Winny did not seem sleepy when she was in bed, and I wasn't either. She talked to me a great deal, and so nicely. It was not about when we should be big girls; it was about *now* things; about not being cross ever, and helping mamma, and about how pretty the flowers had looked, and how kind every one was to us, and how kind God must be to make every one so, and just at the last, as she was falling asleep, she said, "I do wonder so if there are primroses in heaven?" and then she fell asleep, and so did I.

When I woke in the morning, I heard voices talking beside me. It was one of our aunties. She was standing beside Winny, speaking to her. When she looked round and saw that I was awake, she said to me in a kind but rather a strange voice, "Meg, dear, put on your dressing-gown and run down to my room to be dressed. Winny has a headache, and I think she had better not get up to breakfast."

I got up immediately and put on my slippers, and I was running out of the room when I thought of something and ran back. I put Winny's slippers neatly beside her crib, and I said to her, "I have put them ready for you when you get up, Winny." I wanted to do something for her you see, because I was so sorry about her headache. She did not speak, but she looked at me with such a look in her eyes. Then she said, "Kiss me, Meg, dear little Meg," and I was just going to kiss her when she suddenly seemed to remember, and she drew back. "No, dear, you mustn't," she said; "aunty would say it was better not, because I'm not well."

"Could I catch your headache, Winny?" I said, "or is it a cold you've got? You are not *very* ill, Winny?"

She only smiled at me, and just then I heard aunty calling to me to be quick. Winny's little hand was hanging over the side of the bed. I took it, and kissed it—poor little hand, it felt so hot—"I may kiss your hand, mayn't I?" I said, and then I ran away.

All that day I was kept away from Winny, playing by myself in rooms we did not generally go into. Sometimes my aunties would come to the door for a minute and peep at me, and ask me what I would like to play with, but it was very dull. My aunties' maid took me a little walk in garden, and she put me to bed, but I cried myself to sleep because I had not said good-night to Winny.

"Oh how I wish I had never been cross to her!" I kept thinking; and if *only* I could make other children understand how *dreadful* that feeling was, I am sure, quite sure, they would never, never quarrel.

The next day was just the same, playing alone, dinner alone, everything alone. I was so lonely. I never saw aunty till the evening, when it was nearly bed-time, and then she came to the room where I was, and I called out to her immediately to ask how Winny was.

"I *hope* she will soon be better," she said. "And, Meg, dear, it is your bed-time now."

The thought of going to bed again without Winny was too hard. I began to cry.

"O aunty!" I said, "I do so want to say good-night to Winny. I *always* say good-night, and last night I couldn't."

Aunty thought for a minute. She looked so sorry for me. Then she said, "I will see if I can manage it. Come after me, Meg." She went up through a part of the house I did not know, and into a room where there was a closed door. She tapped at

it without opening, and called out. "Meg has come to say good-night to you, through the door, Winny dear."

Then I heard Winny's voice say softly, "I am so glad"; and I called out quite loud, "Good-night, Winny," but Winny answered—I could not hear her voice without listening close at the door—"Not good-night now, Meg. It is *good-bye*, dear Meg."

I looked up at aunty. It seemed to me her face had grown white, and the tears were in her eyes. Somehow, I felt a little afraid.

"What does Winny mean, aunty?" I said in a whisper.

"I don't know, dear. Perhaps being ill makes her head confused," she said. So I called out again, "Good-night, Winny," and aunty led me away.

But Winny was right. It *was* good-bye. The next morning when aunty's maid was dressing me, I saw she was crying.

"What is the matter, Hortense?" I said. "Why are you unhappy? Is any one vexed with you?"

But she only shook her head and would not speak.

After I had had my breakfast, Hortense took me to my aunties' sitting-room. And when she opened the door, to my delight there was mamma, sitting with both my aunties by the fire. I was so pleased, I gave quite a cry of joy, and jumped on to her knee.

"Does Winny know you've come?" I cried, "*dear* mamma."

But when I looked at her I saw that her face was very white and sad, and my poor aunties were crying. Still mamma smiled.

"Poor Meg!" she said.

"What is the matter? Why is everybody so strange to-day?" I said.

Then mamma told me. "Meg, dear," she said, "you must try to remember some of the things I have often told you about Heaven, what a happy place it is, with no being ill or tired, or any troubles. Meg, dear, Winny has gone there."

For a minute I did not seem to understand. I could not

understand Winny's having gone without telling me. A sort of giddy feeling came over me, it was all so strange, and I put my head down on mamma's shoulder, without speaking.

"Meg, dear, do you understand?" she said.

"She didn't tell me she was going," I said, "but, oh yes, I remember she said good-bye last night. Did she go alone, mamma? Who came for her? Did *Jesus*?" Something made me whisper that.

Mamma just said softly, "Yes."

"Had she only her little pink dressing-gown on?" I asked next. "Wouldn't she be cold? Mamma, dear, is it a long way off?"

"Not to *her*," she said. She was crying now.

"Do you think if I set off now, this very minute, I could get up to her?"

But when I said that, mamma clasped me tight.

"Not that too," she whispered. "Meg, Meg, don't say that."

I was sorry for her crying, and I stroked her cheek, but still I wanted to go.

"Heaven is such a nice place, mamma. Winny said so, only she wondered about the primroses. Why won't you let me go, mamma?" And just then my eyes happened to fall on the little piece of black sticking-plaster that Winny had put on my thumb only two evenings before, when she had hurt it without meaning. "Mamma, mamma," I cried, "I *can't* stay here without Winny."

It all seemed to come into my mind then what it would really be to be without her, and I cried and cried till my face *ached* with crying. I can't remember much of that day, nor of several days. I did not get ill, the fever did not come to me somehow, but I seemed to get *stupid* with missing Winny. Mamma and my aunties talked to me, but it did not do any good. They could not tell me the only things I cared to hear—all about Winny, what she was doing, what lessons she would have, if she would always wear white frocks, and all sorts of things, that I must have

sadly pained them by asking. For I did not then at all understand about death. I thought that Winny, my pretty Winny, just as I had known her, had gone to Heaven. I did not know that her dear little body had been laid to rest in the quiet churchyard, and that it was her *spirit*, her pure happy spirit, that had gone to heaven. It was not for a long time after that, that I was old enough to understand at all, and even now it is hard to understand. Mamma says even quite big, and very, very clever people find it hard, and that the best way is to trust to God to explain it afterwards. But still I like to think about it, and I like to think of what my aunties told me of the days Winny was ill—how happy and patient she was, how *she* seemed to “understand” about going, and how she wanted to have wreaths of primroses about her all the time she was ill.

I am a big girl now—nearly twelve. I am a good deal bigger than Winny was when she died, even Blanche is now as big as she was—is that not strange to think of! Perhaps I may live to be quite, quite an old woman—that seems stranger still. But even if I do I shall never forget Winny. I shall know her dear face again, and she will know mine—I feel sure she will, in that happy country where she has gone. But I will never again say “good-night” to my Winny, for in that country “there is no night—neither sorrow nor weeping.”

GOOD-NIGHT WINNY
CATHERINE GREENE
1871



